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EDITORIAL

THE RUSSIA HOUSEKEEPER

If they gave out prizes for Scapegoat of the Year, Mikhail Gorbachev has surely earned himself a place at the top of the list. Although he won the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, the disarray in his country was such that he apparently thought it wise not to travel to Oslo to accept it. And although he has brought his nation closer to democracy than it has ever been, he now stands accused—depending on which Sovietologist you read—of having moved too fast, causing the incipient breakup of the Soviet Union; moved too slow, causing violent unrest in the republics; caved in to the K.G.B.; or shown his true colors (red). And some are saying he ought to resign.

But there is a less doom-laden interpretation of events. The shake-up at the Interior Ministry, perhaps even the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze (with his warning against reactionary forces) and Gorbachev's attempt to build a coalition with moderate conservatives, may be seen as his best effort to safeguard the historic process of reform that he set in motion five years ago. And the demand to bring order to the present chaos is now heard from all sides—not just from the conservative die-hards.

The glib suggestion that Gorbachev resign ignores the absence of desirable alternatives. Surely Boris Yeltsin, demagogic favorite of the Western pundits, has shown himself inadequate for the task. The possibility that Gorbachev may resort to repressive measures to create the conditions for reform is cause for concern. But it is reassuring that in six years on the world stage he has shown no sign of wanting to go down in history as the man who abolished his own reforms.

This is the greatest reformation in modern history. There are no guarantees that it will succeed. But who ever said it would be easy?

BUSH'S TEACHER
Godfrey Hodgson

BIG GIRLS AND BAD BOYS
Alexander Cockburn

LIVING ON THE EDGE IN ISRAEL
Hillel Schenker

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Mark Edmundson

FALSE PROPHET—I

THE RISE OF LOUIS FARRAKHAN

ADOLPH REED JR.

Louis Farrakhan is all over America. In the past year he has been the subject of widely publicized feature-length interviews in *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times*, and in other non-black publications as well. He tore up the campaign trail on behalf of local and Congressional candidates in the Nation of Islam's first direct foray into electoral politics. He was prominent at rallies and demonstrations in support of embattled former Washington Mayor Marion Barry, despite having denounced him only a few months earlier as a drug fiend and philanderer. Farrakhan has even been a featured solo guest on *Donahue*. He has kept up a torrid pace of speaking engagements and, of late, has begun to stake out a position critical of U.S. intervention in the Persian Gulf [see box on page 54].

Recognition of Farrakhan as a public figure has been growing since his involvement in Jesse Jackson's first campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984. But understanding what his rise means in American life requires going back much further than that.

Louis Farrakhan, now 57, has been around a long time. Like Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin and hip-hop, he had considerable visibility among blacks before whites discovered him. For well over thirty years he has propagated a vision of political separatism and a program of moral rearmament, "self-help" business development and an idiosyncratic brand of Islamic reli-

(*Cont. on p. 51*)

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LETTERS.

FEELING BAD

Waltham, Mass.
I felt bad when I read Robyn Selman's review of Barnard's New Women Poets Series ["Eyes on the Prize," Oct. 29]. She said nice things about my work and about that of the other four poets published in the series so far, and she denounced the series itself in defense of the most noble and threatened of social principles, diversity. But it made me feel bad to see a woman poet in the mainstream press bashing one of the country's two women's poetry series. To divide women up by class or ethnicity and then publicly to attack one group in defense of another seems like a bad idea in these times, already full as they are of bad ideas about women and bad-mouthing of their work and their institutions. As Selman says, "Barnard's editors are currently discussing how to reform the process" of screening and judging submissions, and Selman offers no specific advice, so what is her point? Here's what I say: Leave women-bashing to those whose business it is. No woman should ever say that any five of the kind of woman it takes to become and remain a poet in this world are all "the same"—unless to say that we (and Selman) are all the same, as we are, in sharing (unequally) the burden of silence and exclusion and oppression and managing in spite of it to make songs. *Mary Campbell*

WORST REVENGE

New York City
I write as James Welch's editor for his latest novel, *The Indian Lawyer*, and, in paperback or in hardcover, for his three previous novels, *Fools Crow*, *The Death of Jim Loney* and *Winter in the Blood*. I am deeply disturbed that you would publish as incoherent and self-pitying a rant as David Seals produced in the guise of a review of *The Indian Lawyer* ["Blackfeet Barrister," Nov. 26]. Welch is an important novelist, writing deeply and subtly on core themes of assimilation and alienation in Native American life, and he deserves serious critical consideration, not a more-Indian-than-thou lecture.

What is Seals's problem with James Welch, and Louise Erdrich, anyway? As near as I can tell, the rap is that they write *too* well, producing fiction with pacing, insight, polish—and correct grammar. (This must be the first review in literary history to cite this last quality as a weakness.) If they wrote rougher-edged fiction, I suppose, full of run-on sentences and slack, repetitive narrative technique, Seals would like their work better, and so, he claims, would the nonreaders on the reservation. He even suggests that somewhere within James Welch is a tribal narrative voice struggling to emerge, only to be strangled by "some goddamn editor, probably." I assure Seals that, having edited the manuscripts of *Fools Crow* (a superb book as full of "tribal voice" as one could imagine) and *The Indian Lawyer*, I didn't come anywhere near strangulation. I avoid such editorial meddling as a professional policy.

Somewhere in Seals's screed are to be found serious issues concerning the conflict between the dictates of art and the untidy realities of social and racial conflict. They are obscured by his naked envy that Welch, Erdrich and others have, in his view, watered down their fiction to enter what he calls, hilariously, "the high finance world of Good English." In my view, if one wishes to indict an eminently indictable dominant culture, writing badly is the worst possible revenge. I'm sorry that David Seals feels shut out from the red-hot publishing centers, but *The Nation* should not have let him take out his disappointment in print on James Welch. *Gerald Howard*

MEDICINE BUNDLE

Oakland, Calif.
David Seals's review of *The Indian Lawyer* does not recognize how important this novel is to the category of books by and about American Indians. One of the exciting things that is happening in Indian literature, to use Seals's term, is that one can find such a wide divergence in style. If we want to write in the oral language style, we can. But to say that Indian writers should write like Indians is an insult. English is a second language for many, yes, but we learned it, and if we take it to tell our stories, then that is a further triumph. James Welch has created a contemporary novel, in a contemporary voice, about contemporary American Indian people who do keep their traditional life close to them, like a medicine bundle worn about the neck. It deserves to be reviewed with more insight and sensitivity. *Ramona Wilson*

SLIPPERY AX

Missoula, Mont.
David Seals's recent review is guilty of blatant stereotyping of Native Americans (all the more abhorrent because it comes cloaked in "I know, I am one" robes). Again and again, Seals speaks for "his people"—Indians.

Which Indians, Seals? Dangerously, pathetically, by lumping "Indians" together he ignores the variety of the Native American experience. Is there no difference between Seminoles and Navajos? Blackfeet and Mohawks? Following Seals's example, why shouldn't we speak, just as blithely, of "Europeans" or "Jews" or "South Americans"? Seals has written a bitter, petty, myopic article. I don't know what axes he feels he has to grind. I do wish one of them had slipped and cut his writing hand. Perhaps during his recuperation he would have had time to think things over before committing them to paper.
Bryan Di Salvatore

SEALS REPLIES

Rapid City, S.D.
I'm glad to be able to stimulate a long-overdue debate about just what exactly is "American Indian literature." It is no surprise that Welch's editor would take umbrage, for my review clearly states that Welch has written a good book despite the obstacles of the publishing industry and, perhaps, the proclivities of its editors. I did not say that to write clearly is to have one's tribal voice choked off. Rather, it is a matter of whether to succumb to the prose-pimps or to take the more difficult road and maintain our ancient oral tradition. And to me, multimillion-dollar advances to the Tom Clancys and Stephen Kings describe a high-finance world that I, yes, envy nakedly—but also despise, as I feel the state of American literature is deplorable largely because of these not uncommon, irresistible commercial temptations, which screw up the pursuit of poetry and serious literature for the rest of us. The vitriol of the letter writers implies an approval of the established practices. We all know what makes a commercial novel—but there are a lot of Indians out there in the bush for whom novels like *The Indian Lawyer* are as alien as the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa María. *David Seals*

LLOYDY, LOYDY!

Tucson, Ariz.
I live on a street named Lloyd Bush. That's why I noticed the misspelling of Peregrina's name in Carolyn Cooke's review of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* ["Arizona Dreaming," Nov. 26]. His first name is Loyd. For five or six years Kingsolver drove home past a sign for Lloyd Bush Drive, but some letters in the first word were transposed, to "Llyod." Kingsolver, as she explained to a local newspaper, considered the effect and speculated what it would be like to have a name that was misspelled. The upshot was that from a street sign she found the name for Peregrina. *R. Brant Davids*

ADDITION

Due to a fax transmission error, the names of these people did not appear below their letter, "Truth, Justice and Impunity," in the Letters column for December 24: The Rev. David J. Kalke, international general secretary, International Association Against Torture; Patti McSherry, secretary general, World University Service-U.S.; Anantonia Reyes, member of executive council, Guatemala Human Rights Commission/Mexico D.F.; Carlos Varela; Dr. Luis Nieves Falcon, U.N. representative, International League for the Rights & Liberation of Peoples.

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EDITORIALS.

Points of Disorder

For brazen deceit and sheer fraudulence, no presidential project or Hollywood high concept has come close to George Bush's creation of a New World Order, with him at its head. Even the harshest critics of Bush's domestic rule, which is almost universally considered a disaster, find his foreign policy visionary. There's talk of a Nobel Prize nomination and, if the whole thing doesn't sink in the sands of Araby (a distinct possibility), he may be assured of a favored place in diplomatic history.

As best as can be made out, the New World Order is the system of global security Bush believes will replace the dead old order of cold war standoff. *Time*'s "Men of the Year" story (an absurdly schizoid idea that celebrates Bush's diplomacy and dismisses his domestic agenda) defines it as a system "midwifed" by Bush whereby "the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the superpowers that kept the world in dread of nuclear annihilation for 40 years, would cooperate to maintain peace and order, and the U.N. would deter aggression as its founders intended."

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But the most elementary attempts at deconstructing that shining edifice show its contradictions. First of all, the new order cannot be built upon cooperation between Washington and Moscow, because the United States now has all the power. Bush calls all the shots, bullying and bribing the other, fallen superpower as is necessary or convenient. No Soviet diplomat, not even the sainted Shevardnadze, was happy about America's buildup for a major war in the U.S.S.R.'s "backyard," but it was not remotely possible to oppose an armed and dangerous American imperial force.

It was President Gorbachev, in his memorable address to the U.N. General Assembly two years ago, who postulated a more equitable post-cold war order, based on U.N. leadership. What he did not foresee was that in the current context of global power relationships, the United States holds virtually all the cards in the Security Council. In the one-state, one-vote General Assembly an anti-U.S. coalition might be formed (although Secretary of State Baker could buy a lot of votes there, too). In the superpower-weighted Council, however, America can now have its way.

The cold war order was not without its advantages. The leaders of both sides often, though not always, found it best to rein in their clients and satellites so as to avoid serious regional conflict. If that order still held, the Russians may have kept Saddam from his worst excesses in Kuwait, or, failing that, could have prevented massive U.S. intervention.

The downside, of course, was that the interests of millions of people were brokered by bureaucratic or imperial elites. The superpowers hardly distinguished between progressive insurgencies and aggressive attacks; it mattered only who benefited from the activity. Now there are none of the advantages of bipolar standoff and all the drawbacks of the unopposed abuse of power, whether in Panama or the Persian Gulf.

In the end, the New World Order is just a P.R. phrase for old-fashioned global gangsterism in an increasingly one-sided system. The hope is that it will not last long, either because of overreaching ambitions (i.e., war in the gulf) or because it will inevitably be crushed by its own evident contradictions. Repression of peoples in the name of security cannot go on forever, as every local or world cop learns, and the United States cannot indefinitely fill the power vacuum into which Bush and Baker rushed after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The New World Order is playing to hefty houses this winter, but like the rest of Bush's concepts, it just doesn't ring true.

BODY POLITIC

This week President Bush told *Time* that he had a feeling in his "gut" that Saddam Hussein would withdraw from Kuwait before war. That's better than last month, when he said that Saddam might "get his ass kicked." (How fortunate we all are that Saddam resisted the temptation to up the ante in the language war by threatening to kick Bush in the balls. Even the U.S. Congress could not be expected to take such an assault on the national masculinity lying down.) But now Bush's gut tells him that Saddam "will get out of there," even though "that flies in the face" of what some Arab leaders tell him. Students of political anatomy suggest that the real possibility of peace lies in Bush's index finger, which he holds periodically in the wind to see which way U.S. and world opinion blows. It's almost enough to make one nostalgic for the days when Presidents claimed to worry about our hearts and minds.

Lessons Lost

Members of the Congressional intelligence committees went home at the end of last session believing that because they had passed the Intelligence Authorization Act, they had finally concluded a four-year effort to alter the conduct of covert action [see David MacMichael, "Overt Inaction," September 17, 1990]. Their work was undone, however, when President Bush exercised a surprise pocket veto of the measure, proving that little has changed in the executive branch as a result of the Iran/*contra* scandal.

The new legislation would have rectified some ambiguity in the Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980, a law that Reagan easily evaded, keeping Congress in the dark about his covert arms sales to Iran and his secret solicitations of third-party funding for the *contras*. But the lessons of the scandal seem to have been lost on Congress as well, which passed a bill only modestly strengthening its own oversight of covert action and watered down a number of provisions, ironically on the promise of Bush's support. It agreed, for example, to drop a requirement that the President notify Congress no later than forty-eight hours after initiating a covert action on those rare occasions when prior notice is not possible. Yet in a report accompanying the bill, the intelligence committees interpreted current law to mean that after-the-fact notice must be provided within a few days. Bush balked at such a reading, citing it as one reason for his about-face.

But Bush's main objection was a provision that would have compelled him to report any use of third parties to fund or carry out a covert operation on behalf of the United States (although the third party's identity could remain secret). Congress has long accepted the use of third parties for such operations so long as the intelligence committees are kept informed, but Bush wants the power to act alone. A curb on third-party operations is vital if there is to be even an iota of reform. Without it, a President who can find a surrogate will have no impediment to conducting a covert operation in direct violation of a Congressional prohibition.

With his veto of the oversight proposal Bush keeps the door open for executive lawlessness. That may be his intent. There's no indication yet of how Congress will respond, but given the sorry history of compromise it's clear what Congress *should* do: re-examine the whole question of covert operations and move to prohibit their use altogether. GARY STERN

Gary Stern is research associate with the Center for National Security Studies, an A.C.L.U./Fund for Peace project.

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Lessons Learned

If I heard it once from the P.L.O. people in Amman, I heard it a dozen times. "If Kuwait produced carrots instead of oil, are you asking us to believe that George Bush would have sent 400,000 troops to the gulf?" Well, maybe not, if only because if Kuwait only grew carrots, it wouldn't have been so tempting to Saddam Hussein. Even so, I told my Arab hosts, you don't understand George Bush. And I would tell them what I believe to be, if not the "defining anecdote," at least a story that explains a good deal about Bush's actions in the gulf. It is this:

On June 14, 1940, four days before Charles de Gaulle's fateful radio broadcast from London announcing the continued resistance of the Free French, Henry Lewis Stimson delivered the commencement address at his old school, Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. As the German panzers rolled across Europe, he told the boys that a civilization that had been built up over four centuries was under attack. But, he added, when he looked at their faces he was filled not with pity but with the wish to congratulate them because they were fortunate to have been placed at a moment of great opportunity to choose between good and evil. One of the young men whose faces Stimson was looking at that day was George Bush. It was not long afterward that Bush enlisted in the Navy.

George Bush has not commented on the matter, but it is probable that Stimson was a specific, personal influence on his moral and political development. Stimson, after all, a former Secretary of State and twice Secretary of War, was a member of Skull and Bones, the secret society at Yale of which both Bush and his father were members. It appears that Stimson, who attributed great importance to Bones as a moral influence, visited the society's tomblike meeting place in New Haven while George Bush was an undergraduate member.

More to the point, as a young man Bush was brought up in the Stimson tradition and no doubt revered the older man as the dean of East Coast Republican internationalism. Stimson was the link between the robust, even bellicose, Republican internationalists around his first hero, Teddy Roosevelt, and the establishment internationalists—by no means all Republicans—like Dean Acheson, who shaped U.S. foreign policy in the cold war.

Between the 1890s and the 1950s, such men were nationalists in the sense that they proudly embraced the idea that the United States was now a great power. They were internationalists in the sense that they believed their country must play a great part in the world. They did not shrink from war. Many of Teddy Roosevelt's friends spoke of war as a cleansing cold bath that would restore virility to an enervated generation. Stimson himself regretted that he had not fought in the Civil War, as had his father and his mentors, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Charles Francis Adams. He was ashamed that he had not fought in Cuba in 1898 alongside Roosevelt and another role model, Gen. Leonard Wood. And he was intensely proud of the fact that he had served at the front as a volunteer in World War I, at the age of 49. (Afterward he liked to be addressed as Colonel Stimson.) In World War II, as F.D.R.'s Secretary of War, Stimson helped prepare the country for war not only administratively and physically but also politically and psychologically, and when the time came he did not hesitate to take his substantial share of the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan.

At the end of his life Stimson had second thoughts about making the threat of atomic war an instrument of national policy. But the lessons George Bush and others, like James Baker, learned between 1938 and 1948 probably seem highly relevant to them today. Bad men must be resisted with diplomacy, but if diplomacy fails, with force. The sooner they are checked, the better; it is clear that George Bush applies instinctively not only the Hitler parallel but the Munich analogy. The task of the leader is not to negotiate or prevaricate but to draw a line in the sand and, if that line is crossed, to fight.

George Bush is now preparing to fight, not for oil or even—as some in the Middle East and in Europe suspect—to install U.S. influence in a turbulent region that happens to control close to half the world's energy reserves. Up to a point, no doubt, Bush has acted to preserve the integrity of the international system. Yet I believe the impulse is essentially not "other-directed," to borrow the distinction David Riesman established in *The Lonely Crowd*, but "inner-directed."

His response to the crisis has been to reach for the teachings of the warrior Puritanism in which he was brought up. It closely followed Stimson's response to Hitler. It was in November 1932, with Hitler less than two months from power, that Secretary of State Stimson "broke out" at a meeting of his advisers, as he recorded in his diary, and denounced "the timidity of governments." The time had come, he said, "when somebody has got to show some guts." For George Bush, in fact, avenging the rape of Kuwait appeared almost as an initiation ritual. For others, of course, it may well be more tragic.

GODFREY HODGSON

Godfrey Hodgson is foreign editor of The Independent *of London and author of* The Colonel: The Life and Wars of Henry Stimson 1867-1950 *(Knopf).*

★

Disharmony Among The President's Men

Sununu and Darman can never see harm in
their scheming for personal gain.
Newt Gingrich of Georgia, that cornpone
L. Borgia, enjoys causing both of them pain.
New Paradigm wackos, relentless as backhoes,
would shove Darman down a crevasse.
It's hardly smooth sailing, revealing a failing:
Bush doesn't know how *to kick ass.*

Calvin Trillin

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

From Crisis to Catastrophe

Ardmore, Ireland

The British seem mostly to assume that war is inevitable, and even relatively liberal newspapers like *The Independent* ran New Year editorials saying that unless Saddam Hussein pulls out of Kuwait in the next few weeks the shooting will have to start. There is the intimation that the Americans may not have the kidney for combat, an old charge of cowardice, very vigorous during the Korean War. Sir Michael Howard wrote in *The Times* on January 2 that "the American media, unable to distinguish between impartiality and irresponsibility, exploit every suggestion of poor morale among the American forces in the Gulf."

Politically there is a bipartisan consensus between Tories and Labor to urge Bush forward. The Germans, pushing for peaceful compromise, are denounced as traumatized by the past! Adding to the atmosphere of impending martial combat were photographs run on most front pages showing army reservists at Aldershot fitted out in gas masks. They had a peculiarly antique aroma to them, like a World War I scrapbook. In this same vein *The Observer*'s Colin Smith had a lengthy report from Saudi Arabia about British regiments awaiting conflict, decorated by a picture of the commanding officer summoning his driver by hunting horn.

For reasons partially explained by the fact that Kuwait kept its money in London, Britain seems set on urging the United States toward war. When Margaret Thatcher was still at 10 Downing Street this was understandable. Being bellicose was her stock in trade. But her successor is equally fervent, rushing to Washington to stand at Bush's elbow and announce that Saddam Hussein should not be "rewarded" for aggression, which usually means that the United States and its allies should not commit themselves to an international conference on the future of the region.

There's no point in Baker meeting Aziz unless he has something substantive to say about such a conference. Otherwise, the encounter will be window dressing to persuade Americans that George Bush went the last half-mile for peace. Without U.S. agreement to the convening of a conference in the wake of an Iraqi pullout from Kuwait, it's likely that Saddam will stay put and so there will be a war, which means thousands of people will die in order not to have a conference, in order not to talk about Palestinians.

The two U.S. allies that could have had a restraining influence are the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. But it was Thatcher who first pushed Bush toward his assertions that not only should Iraq quit Kuwait but Saddam himself should be driven from power and hauled before a war crimes tribunal while Iraqi military power is decimated. This stance had predictable results, with Iraq retorting that if withdrawal from Kuwait would be rewarded by the bombing of Baghdad, why bother to leave? Instead of insisting that economic sanctions remain the U.N. strategy, the Soviet Union's Shevardnadze did exactly what Baker asked of him, which is why this compliant buffoon is now being hailed in the Western press as the greatest statesman since Talleyrand.

Class Actions

Aside from his sortie to Washington to urge Bush into war (a traditional role for the British), Prime Minister John Major is practically invisible in his blandness, still best known for his declared ambition to make Britain a classless society. He has a big job. Just before Christmas a judge at the High Court in London awarded an 8-year-old £1.2 million against medical negligence at birth that rendered him permanently immature mentally.

Mr. Justice Rose gave young Hugo Cassel the big sum saying he was "physically attractive" and "with the artistic and entrepreneurial genes in his ancestry" many opportunities would have been open to him. But for his injuries, the judge added, Hugo would have gone to Eton and probably to university and then probably into the law, since his uncle, grandfather and great-grandfather were all eminent barristers. Class was what got Hugo his £1.2 million.

About the time of this bracing demonstration of class consciousness Shirley Robin Letwin of the *Daily Telegraph* unleashed a paean to Thatcher and, by implication, an attack on Major: "The daughter of the Grantham grocer had acquired the soul of a patrician. Her 'life style' displayed the self-sufficiency, the fearlessness and high breeding of that curious English perfection of an aristocrat, a gentleman."

Meanwhile, the object of these rhapsodies was handing out honors to her supporters. Thatcher turned industrialists into knights at a faster rate than any Prime Minister since Lloyd George, according to *The Observer*'s Adam Raphael. Seventeen were made into peers, their companies having contributed a total of £5 million to the Conservative Party, or about £300,000 per peerage. A knighthood, similarly averaged, cost about £150,000. To the press, which gave her equally valuable adulation, went knighthoods too: Sir Larry Lamb of *The Sun*, Sir John Junor of *The Mail on Sunday*, Sir David English of the *Daily Mail*, Lord Stevens of United Newspapers, Sir Nick Lloyd of the *Daily Express*, Sir Peregrine Worsthorne of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Sir Bernard Ingham, who was her press secretary.

She also tried to get a knighthood for her most important journalistic sponsor, Rupert Murdoch. Since he's an American citizen now it would have been honorary, like those given Reagan and Weinberger. But the relatively toothless Political Honors Scrutiny Committee turned this one down. It seems the committee feared that the Queen would say "Arise, Sir Rupert" even as his empire, $8 billion in debt, came crashing down about his ears. Also it emerges that Murdoch had put up £150,000 to finance an ultraright slander sheet, *British Briefing*. The paper's first publisher was his friend Brian Crozier, whose name has long been linked with the C.I.A.; it is now run by Thatcher's friend David Hart and has used material supplied by Charles Elwell, who previously headed the "F" or "antisubversive" branch of M.I.5. The smears were

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traditional, of the kind that used to be doled out by the F.B.I. to its journalistic contacts, charging Labor Party leader Neil Kinnock with being a closet red and kindred foolishness.

Elwell was at the heart of the Clockwork Orange operation organized in Northern Ireland by M.I.5 in the mid-1970s with the aim of slandering Labor politicians. So we find the usual collusion of press and intelligence service in a dirty tricks operation, with Murdoch as bagman.

It's not hard to figure out the equations that led from Murdoch's rickety empire to the £150,000 bankroll for *British Briefing*. The health of his British operations depends in part on the complaisance of the government. If, for example, the Labor Party were in power, the Monopolies Commission might have taken a harsh attitude to the merger of his Sky Television with its rival. *British Briefing* was one more tiny salvo amid the heavy artillery of his mass circulation newspapers seeking to insure that the Labor Party was never afforded that chance for revenge.

In the Shadow of the Black Madonna

The Polish Parliament recently voted 182–48 to deprive the hundred surviving veterans of the International Brigade Dabrowski—who fought against fascism in the defense of Madrid and on the Jarama and Guadalajara fronts—of their rights as war veterans, including the right to a pension.

Before Christmas the Spanish daily *El Pais* reported this news, including the fact that the vote had been pushed by Lech Walesa's parliamentary group of Solidarity, one of whose members defined the brigade as "a bunch of reds dedicated to burning churches and killing priests." Among these veterans, said *El Pais*, was Zofia Szleyen, 86 years old, a Polish translator of Spanish literature who was recently given one of Spain's highest awards in the arts.

Vincente Navarro sent the clip from *El Pais*, and I looked at it along with a story by Stephen Engelberg in the *International Herald Tribune* for December 29-30 describing how managers of freshly privatized enterprises in Poland are trying to get rid of workers' councils, established during the Communist period in state-run factories. One such manager is Jan Sidorowicz, installed as head of Polkolor after its workers had fired his predecessor. Sidorowicz now seeks permanent appointment and told Engelberg that "more or less 60 percent of these councils are bad for the enterprises." Previously Sidorowicz chaired the employee council and also headed the Solidarity union.

Time of Trial for British Buggers

Britons hiding out in Kuwait after the invasion were particularly cautious about using the telephone. Their number included the team that under the Sabahs had installed an elaborate phone monitoring system for the rulers of the emirate. The Britons were unsure whether the Iraqis had learned to operate the system, which in part functioned on the buzzword principle whereby certain words or phrases—apparently in a large range of languages—would activate the eavesdropping equipment.

Homage to Big Girls

I went to the annual hunt ball of the West Waterford Hunt which took place this year in Dungarvan, eight miles along the coast from Ardmore. Class divisions have certainly receded. Back in the 1950s when I used to hunt and go to such things, the balls were very Anglo-Irish affairs and held in such fastnesses of privilege as Lismore Castle, Irish seat of the Duke of Devonshire and now available for rent from his grace at $12,000 a week.

The bash in Dungarvan took place in a modern hotel amid great apprehension, since the Gardai (police) were conducting a ferocious anti-drunk driving campaign, stopping one in three and giving them tests. That morning a farmer had been torn from his tractor and arrested after gasping fragrant billows of Paddy into the bag. After 11, I switched to barley water and in this sober state looked across to the young folk at the next table who were raising a great din.

They were mostly drunk, but not in that beefy, red-faced way I remember in the hearties of my generation. One young man did get up on the table and shyly lowered his trousers for a moment, which would not have happened in my time. There were harsh words about this at the lawn meet the next day. The girls were less hefty too. The poet Betjeman, who loved not only Dungarvan but also big girls, would have been sorely disappointed.

> Pam, I adore you, Pam, you great big mountainous sports girl . . .
> See the strength of her arm, as firm and hairy as Hendren's,
> See the size of her thighs, the pout of her lips as cross,
> And full of pent-up strength she swipes at the rhododendrons,
> Lucky the rhododendrons . . .

I know how Betjeman felt. A big girl named Ann used to muck out the stables in the days when my mother bred horses. Just the memory of her powerful arms holding a pitchfork load of straw and horse dung still makes me go weak at the knees. These days she's married to the manager of a tea plantation in Zimbabwe and writes to say life's fine.

> Red hair she had and golden skin,
> Her sulky lips were shaped for sin,
> Her sturdy legs were flannel-slack'd,
> The strongest legs in Pontefract . . .
> Oh love! for love I could not speak,
> It left me winded, wilting, weak
> And held in brown arms strong and bare
> And wound with flaming ropes of hair.

People forget what a fetishist Betjeman was. He once said he couldn't imagine anything more wonderful than being a bicycle seat ("I think that I should rather like/ to be the saddle of a bike"). And remember his poem "Senex," when he sees the lovers' bicycles in the hedge:

> Get down from me! I thunder there,
> You spaniels! Shut your jaws!
> Your teeth are stuffed with underwear,
> Suspenders torn asunder there
> And buttocks in your paws!

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BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN

■ 'Almost' Only Counts in Horseshoes and Hand Grenades

"David, it was so terrible, it's hard to describe. Just to give you a little background on this, I handed it to Barbara as we left Camp David. And she read about two pages of it and said, 'I can't read any more.'" That's President Bush talking to celebrity chatter David Frost about the Amnesty International report on human rights violations committed by Iraqi forces in Kuwait. Bush, in an interview aired on PBS on January 2, gave a graphic account of events detailed in the study: the torturing of a handicapped child, the rape of young girls and the application of electric shocks to the "private parts" of men and women. "It is primeval," the President protested. "It's almost impossible to rationalize this behavior with the fact that this is 1990."

Since the President appears shocked by what are, unfortunately, ordinary actions in many parts of the world, he should read several other reports next. He might start by curling up in the Executive Bedroom with the *Amnesty International Report 1990*, a country-by-country guide. With Syria a member in good standing of the anti-Saddam alliance, Bush might peruse the section on "routine torture" in that nation. The various methods allegedly used by Syrian authorities include electric shock, beatings (sometimes with metal cables), water immersion and bondage. There are plenty of other countries that might attract his interest, such as Honduras, Pakistan and Egypt. The Amnesty report also notes that both Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian authorities have engaged in torture.

Should he desire more information, Bush could turn to *Torture in the Eighties*, another Amnesty report. Perhaps he would like to share with Barbara this eyewitness account of a married couple being "interrogated" in Turkey, a favored partner in the U.S.-led coalition against Saddam:

> A torturer would play with the genital organs of the wife, squeezing her breasts and caressing her hair while the husband watched. The reverse would be applied to the husband. While his wife watched they would give electric shocks to his penis, hang him by his feet. They would threaten to rape his wife unless he would admit the accusations made against him.

This volume is full of such accounts from countries that the Reagan-Bush administrations have been pleased to do business with, such as Argentina (electric shock, cigarette burns, water immersion), Chile (shock, rape, drugs, blows to the ears, drowning) and El Salvador (burning the flesh with sulfuric acid). Now consider Bush's adept use of "almost" in the quote above. Once he absorbs all of Amnesty's material, maybe we can expect Bush "almost" to change U.S. policy by restoring human rights as a prominent goal worldwide.

■ Bungle in the Jungle

Bush took time off last month from his management of the Persian Gulf crisis to hail as "wonderful" a government survey indicating progress in the other war—the war on drugs. A poll of 9,259 households led the National Institute on Drug Abuse to conclude that the number of Americans who tried an illicit drug in the past year was 25 percent lower than the number in 1985 and—more significant—that the population of hard-core crack and cocaine abusers fell from 862,000 in 1988 to 662,000 in 1990. NIDA's contractors reached the latter statistic by extrapolating from sixty-three responses. Another estimate of regular cocaine abusers—put out by the staff of Senator Joseph Biden—places the figure at 2.4 million and on the rise.

More bad news about the other war comes from the office of Senator Alan Cranston. Of late, Cranston has been widely and deservedly rapped for his starring role in the Keating Five scandal. But credit him for paying attention to the impact of U.S. antidrug policy on democratic institutions in South America. Last month he sent a letter to Secretary of State James Baker criticizing the Administration for pressuring the Bolivian government to involve its army in drug-busting. The letter noted that U.S. policy-makers defend expansion of the Bolivian army's role by explaining that it is jealous of the air force and navy, which are already involved in antidrug efforts and are receiving U.S. financial support. Cranston argued that this militarization of the antinarcotics campaign will expand the influence and power of a military that as recently as 1980 overthrew a civilian government and installed a vicious regime. This policy, Cranston wrote, "is reinforcing attitudes that the military can better maintain public order than civilian institutions, which may in fact undermine the very democratic institutions the U.S. government should be supporting." The letter further noted that U.S. officials—presumably those who work in the embassy in La Paz—maintain that opposition to army participation is driven either by communist subversives or people on the payroll of drug traffickers. How predictable.

■ Another Tunnel

The efforts of the supply-side drug warriors run counter to economic imperatives. Recently Peter Reuter, an economist at the Rand Corporation, briefed a Washington gathering of think-tank policy analysts and Capitol Hill aides. Using a simple set of figures tracing the price of a kilogram of cocaine as it travels from grower to street dealer, Reuter demonstrated that source eradication campaigns make little economic sense because the cost of the coke (or the coca leaf) is so low at the early stages of production. Traffickers are quite able to pay more for coca leaf or paste—and thus provide a strong incentive for leaf growing even in the face of militarized eradication campaigns—without needing to raise the street cost. At best, eradication efforts in Bolivia or Peru will probably result only in pushing leaf growing to other regions and countries. By propelling greater involvement of Latin American armed forces in the war on drugs, the United States is again relying on military might to combat large social forces. If he continues on this path, Bush may end up with more than one new Vietnam on his hands.

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ARTICLES.

LETTER FROM ISRAEL

A Nation Living On the Edge

HILLEL SCHENKER

Tel Aviv, December 31

People are afraid to go out in the streets of Tel Aviv at night. During the day, children are told to travel in pairs at all times. And a trip to Jerusalem is considered a venture that should possibly be postponed, at least for now. I think the fears are exaggerated, but then again, fear is not a rational thing. It reminds me of the people of Long Island who don't go into Manhattan after dark, or who have stayed away from the subways for years because the underground is a combat zone.

From August to October fear took the form of a sense of an imminent chemical weapons attack, which might be launched against Israel any day. There was a run on baking soda in the supermarkets because it was believed to be an antidote for nerve gas (a claim that proved to be unfounded). And there was a tremendous outcry for the distribution of gas masks until populist politicians decided to give the people what they wanted, despite the reservations of the military and strenuous protests from the Minister of Tourism, who knew that it would be a terrible blow to the travel industry. At first, fear of an Iraqi attack was very tangible, but as the days, weeks and months went by, the fears dissipated or receded into the subconscious, though they will undoubtedly be revived as January 15 draws near.

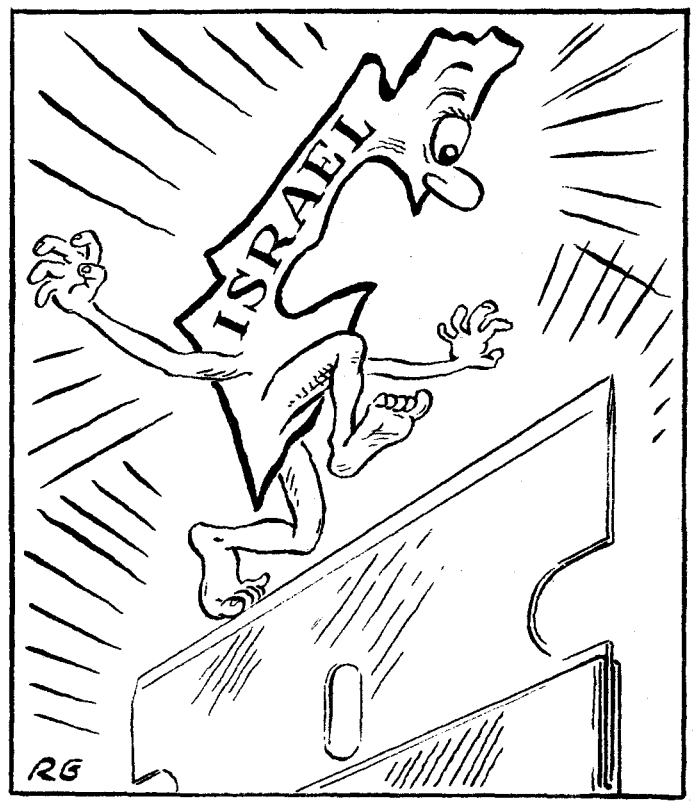
By November and December, everything turned inward. In the background, we have a strange, eerie winter, with no rain and summerlike temperatures. And the fear that prevails today does not emanate from Iraq. Maybe this is what the gates of hell are like.

The *intifada* entered its fourth year on December 10, and Meron Benvenisti's apocalyptic vision of intercommunal Israeli-Palestinian fratricide is beginning to appear prophetic. "The days of the '*intifada*-deluxe' are over," proclaims Yoel Marcus in *Ha'aretz*. "The smell of Lebanon is in the air." Pacifists such as the Israeli Amos Gvirtz; the Palestinian Mubarak Awad, now in exile in the United States; and Professor Johan Galtung, founder of the Peace Research Institute of Oslo, have advocated a nonviolent Martin Luther King Jr./Gandhian *intifada* as a tool for the rapid liberation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and for laying the foundation for coexistence between a future Palestinian state and Israel. While agreeing that this is desirable, I have always believed that in the context of the Middle East the nonlethal *intifada*, as it was carried out during most of the first three years of the struggle (a combination of rock throwing and gasoline bombs, nonviolent civil disobedience and infrastructure building), was as close as one could get to the ideal.

Unfortunately, the rock is being replaced today by the knife. After three years of struggle and no significant movement toward ending the occupation, the Palestinians are frustrated and hurting. One of their responses has been a series of brutal knife attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel, particularly in Jerusalem and Greater Tel Aviv, carried out by members of the fundamentalist Hamas movement from the occupied territories. The Israeli response is anger, cries of "kill the Arabs" and fear. The schism between Israelis and Palestinians is growing. The two communities found themselves on opposite sides of the grandstand when the Persian Gulf crisis erupted, Palestinians cheering on "the new Nasser" and Israelis hating "the new Haman" (or is it Hitler?). Now Palestinians have added the Temple Mount (Al Aksa mosque) tragedy to their list of grievances, while Israelis count their dead at the end of a knife.

These have not been easy days for the Israeli peace movement. Israeli-Palestinian dialogue continues, both in the Middle East and in Europe, but it is for the most part low-profile and behind the scenes, waiting for a better day. On the third anniversary of the beginning of the *intifada*, 1,500 Peace Now activists demonstrated in Jerusalem for talks and a negotiated political solution to the conflict. Yet at the time of Camp David the movement was able to mobilize 100,000 supporters, and after the massacre of Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, 400,000.

Perhaps the most militant struggle carried out by progressive intellectuals during the past few months was a battle to



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT GROSSMAN

Hillel Schenker is a veteran journalist who covers Israeli and Middle Eastern affairs.

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save the classical music radio station, which was scheduled for cancellation by the cultural overlords of the establishment, who labeled it a waste of precious time and airwaves. With energy that used to be channeled into the struggle for peace, they filled columns of newsprint, gave fiery speeches and made passionate phone calls to the right people. The challenge was met and the tide turned. Beethoven and Bach were saved.

Abie Nathan, who runs the Voice of Peace radio station, prefers Carly Simon and Frank Sinatra, while his deejays play the latest international and Israeli rock. Abie (as he is affectionately known by everyone) still has enough energy to initiate a Jewish-Arab friendship happening together with the municipal council of the Israeli-Arab town of Tira, not far from the West Bank. It took place only a day after three Jews were stabbed to death in Jaffa by Hamas fundamentalists. About 1,000 Jewish Israelis accepted the joint invitation, and for a brief five hours, good vibes and images of what could be, someday over the rainbow, prevailed. Even Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat, a member of the Likud Party and an honored guest, declared that the only answer is a Palestinian state and Jewish-Arab coexistence.

The question is which path to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the country will take.

The next day, friends told me they had been afraid to go to the happening. "Maybe some of the 17,000 people in Tira are crazy fundamentalists who have knives in their kitchens." And Mayor Lahat was attacked by an angry mob in Jaffa when he tried to say a few words of condolence at the funeral of one of the Jews killed two days earlier. "Traitor! Arab lover!" they shouted.

For the most part, fatigue, fear and pessimism predominate. The only compensation is that the right is not in any better shape. No one even remembers the last time the nationalistic Gush Emunim movement was able to establish a new settlement in "Judea and Samaria."

The government is in a quandary. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has been upset ever since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 2; Shamir complained that President Bush was ignoring him. Both Bush and Secretary of State James Baker made visits to the Middle East and had frequent telephone conversations with assorted Middle Eastern leaders, while they seemed to have lost the number of the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem (02-705555; it's in every Israeli phone book). Thus Shamir was genuinely relieved when he received an invitation to visit Washington, following the American President's meeting with President Hafez al-Assad of Syria, who during the first half of Reagan's presidency would surely have qualified as one of the bad guys from the darker side of the earth. Bush apparently decided that American interests in the Middle East required that he have a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, to create the public semblance of an equilibrium to balance the working relationship he had established with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria in the course of the gulf crisis.

Shamir's joy at having been returned to the White House invitation list proved to have been premature. He apparently forgot that free lunches in the District of Columbia are a thing of the past. Meetings with the American leadership require him to face the music, in contrast with the basic status quo philosophy that guides his political inactivity.

This time around, the fabulous Bush and Baker boys decided to apply the carrot-stick approach. The President provided the carrot, a wonderful photo opportunity to demonstrate that all is presumably well with the American-Israeli relationship. Everyone was there save Dan Quayle, who is considered by the upper echelons of the Likud to be the most (if not the only) pro-Israeli member of the current Administration. Nonetheless, the best news was that nothing of substance concerning the Palestinians was discussed at the meeting.

However, when the baton was passed on to Baker, it was transformed into a stick. At the conclusion of their meeting, all Shamir could say to the Israeli reporters was that it was "*generally constructive.*" *Generally constructive?! In the tradition of Menachem Begin, Shamir always declares that his meetings are "excellent," or at least "very good." "Generally constructive" is a euphemism for a very tough encounter. Word has it that most of the meeting was devoted to the peace process.*

When Saddam invaded Kuwait, the Israeli Prime Minister and his close associates celebrated the fact that the international spotlight was focused on the gulf, away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They believed that the Iraqi leader had taught the Americans that the Middle East is a jungle, and that there would be a renewed appreciation of Israel as a strategic asset. The logical result would be the removal of the quest for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the international agenda. Much to their regret, things didn't quite work out that way.

The essence of Baker's message was that though the American Administration did not intend to link formally the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the push for a resolution of the gulf crisis, the Israeli Prime Minister had to prepare himself for the fact that the Israelis and the Palestinians would be the next patients placed on the international operating table, following the hoped-for successful conclusion of Operation Desert Shield.

In other words, if a political resolution of the gulf crisis can be worked out with Saddam, progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front will be part of the deal, so that the Iraqi President won't be totally humiliated in the eyes of his people and of his Arab brothers. And if there is no alternative to a military resolution of the conflict, the price that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria will extract for being partners to a military confrontation with a fellow Arab state will be progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

The question is which path to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the country will take. In November the pollster

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Dr. Mina Zemach reported the results of a recent survey in the mass circulation daily *Yediot Aharonot*. When asked to rank their preferred options for the future of the territories, 33 percent preferred an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, 30 percent preferred autonomy, 20 percent preferred transfer, a euphemism for expulsion of the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip (though only 5 percent believe that it's possible), 10 percent preferred annexation (6 percent with the provision of equal rights to the Palestinians, which would in essence create a binational state, and 4 percent without equal rights, which would create an apartheid-like arrangement), and 7 percent had no clear preference. Indeed, the Green Line that separates Israel from the occupied territories, which was eliminated from official maps by the Likud, has been revived. One of the government's responses to the knife murder of three Jews in Jerusalem on October 21 was to ban the entrance of Palestinian workers from the territories into Israel for a few days (until recently, more than 100,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip worked in Israel every day). The ban proved very popular with the general public and, paradoxically, the Likud found itself reinforcing the desire for partition and withdrawal within Israeli society.

In the beginning of December, Housing and Construction Minister Ariel Sharon, of all people, announced an ambitious plan to build a string of settlements within Israel alongside the West Bank border. The intention is to build thirteen urban communities and additional agricultural settlements for hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jewish immigrants during the next five years. Liberal and progressive columnists had a field day, declaring that "Sharon Re-establishes the Green Line." Given the international political constraints, Sharon obviously feels that he has no alternative but to retrench—though he is still looking for surreptitious ways to settle new immigrants in the territories.

Perhaps even more astonishing was a December 20 report in *Yediot Aharonot* that a ministerial commission appointed by Shamir had resolved that Israel should raise tens of millions of dollars abroad to develop industrial enterprises in the occupied territories, "the goal being to find work for the Palestinians near their homes." The twofold motivation for such a plan would be to release tens of thousands of jobs for the Russian Jewish immigrants and to lessen the security risks inherent in the daily presence inside Israel of more than 100,000 Palestinian workers from the occupied territories. Indirectly, the plan is another step toward the re-establishment of the Green Line.

Of course, if the status quo is doomed, the government can always try a diversionary tactic. In the good old days, a preemptive strike against one of Israel's neighbors might have changed the international agenda. The logical candidate for such an action would be Iraq, but this is not 1981 (when Israel destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor). The stakes in the gulf crisis are too high, and the American Administration does not want Israel to make any surprise moves on the gulf chessboard.

Shamir managed to evade the Baker Plan—which was an extension of his own Shamir Plan, which called for direct Israeli-Palestinian talks—only to be haunted now by the specter of an international conference. He could still surprise everyone with an alternative diplomatic initiative.

One idea being proposed in the government corridors is the Syrian Option: a negotiated treaty with Syria along the lines of Camp David, with the return of a demilitarized Golan Heights and a division of Lebanon into formally acknowledged spheres of influence in exchange for Syrian-Israeli peace. Given the new international realignment of forces, the Syrian Option has become a genuine possibility. But it would serve only to delay the inevitable need to come to grips with the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

The other trial balloon being floated is an Israeli initiative to convene a regional conference to create a Middle East zone free of nuclear and chemical weapons of mass destruction. While such a meeting is urgently needed, the idea is a smokescreen, since Shamir knows very well that most of the neighboring Arab states will be unwilling to participate in such an initiative until the fundamental territorial and national problems are resolved.

The idea of a nuclear and chemical weapons–free zone returns us to the fears that dominated Israeli thinking in August. A recent report in the London *Sunday Times* suggesting that, contrary to previous estimates, Iraq may be only a year or two away from manufacturing a nuclear weapon was highlighted in all the Israeli newspapers. Clearly, most Israelis hope the resolution of the gulf crisis will include the elimination of Iraq's nuclear and chemical weapons potential. If a deal is cut that leaves the Iraqi nonconventional weapons potential intact, the Israeli government has intimated that it might take matters into its own hands at a later date.

Underlying everything in the current Israeli reality is a new demographic time bomb that is steadily ticking away. If the current rate of immigration continues, it is expected that there will be between 1 million and 2 million Soviet Jews arriving in Israel between 1990 and 1995. Today, the first wave of about 190,000 immigrants who arrived in 1990 is surviving on government subsidies to the tune of about $11,500 per family during their first year in Israel. At the end of one year they will be forced to face the harsh reality of the market economy, which includes 160,000 unemployed (10 percent of the work force), 20 percent inflation and a zero economic growth rate. Economists estimate that $40 billion to $50 billion will be needed to absorb these immigrants and create the infrastructure for a productive economy capable of maintaining all these people.

Until recently, the fundamental alternatives being posed by the leading parties concerning the future were Likud's "peace for peace" (meaning peace on our terms, that is, with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under Israeli control) and the Labor Alignment's "territories for peace" (meaning the only way for Israel to save its soul and its human and economic resources is to exchange most or all of the occupied territories for peace).

Now a third option, "prosperity for peace," is emerging. "Immigrants or Territories" is how *Ha'aretz* put it in its December 25 lead editorial, the same day the first tent city of

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homeless Soviet Jewish immigrants was set up in Beersheba. The only way to deal with Israel's overwhelming economic problems is to exchange peace (based upon a demilitarized repartitioning of Israel/Palestine) for economic benefits from the United States and the international financial community. That's what Sadat did at Camp David. That's what Assad may do tomorrow. And that's what Shamir or a successor may be forced to do in the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, the papers are filled with man-on-the-street interviews about fear. Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu suggests that all soldiers on leave be allowed to carry pistols. There are calls for the institution of the death penalty for murder (there is no capital punishment in Israeli except for crimes of genocide). Words like "panic," "hysteria" and "psychosis" are being bandied about. Psychologists talk about the rise in the level of violence in both Israeli and Palestinian societies, compensation for fear and frustration. The right says that the government is not calming the population. The left says that a political initiative toward a resolution of the conflict is the only answer. For all intents and purposes, there is no center.

On December 24, Saddam Hussein told Spanish television that Tel Aviv will be his first target if a war breaks out, even if Israel doesn't participate in an allied attack on Iraq. The next day, the lead headline in all of the papers was a variation on the theme of "High-Level Israeli Army Alert in Case of War." But are Israelis paralyzed by fear? I live five minutes from the Mediterranean shore, and in the midst of this weird Indian summer, the beaches are filled with bathers. The outdoor cafes on Dizengoff, Ben-Yehuda and Ibn Gvirol streets and along the boardwalk are packed. And Sheinkin, Tel Aviv's one-street SoHo/Greenwich Village, also five minutes from my apartment, is flourishing. Nero fiddles while Rome burns. Or to use a metaphor closer to home, it's the Junieh syndrome all over again—while Beirut burned from 1975 to 1990, the Christian middle class played at the Junieh seaside resort.

And everyone waits for the rains to come. □

THE FOCUS GROUP

Helping Big Oil Polish Its Image

DAVID CORN

On a recent Tuesday afternoon corporate America came knocking. It did so in the form of a fax from Don Shadrake, an employee of an outfit in Cleveland called Northcoast Behavioral Research Group. He was organizing a seminar of Washington journalists to discuss corporate image advertisements—those types of ads in which a friendly military contractor, newly indicted for procurement fraud, shows a soft fuzzy photograph of its workers at a company picnic alongside its logo and a feel-good motto such as "For Your Family and Ours." Shadrake's fax invited me to serve on the panel. I didn't quite understand the purpose of the session. "We're just looking to get some feedback on the general subject of corporate image ads," he said during a phone call, explaining that his research group occasionally works for government groups and corporations. It seemed Shadrake was trying to recruit journalists to help businesses design propaganda. Not at all, he assured me. The research was of a general nature, solely for Northcoast's own benefit. The information produced would not be for any particular client. We would not be shown any proposed ads. And sandwiches would be available. These pledges, I soon discovered, were all lies.

Shadrake dangled an "honorarium" of $150. He firmly guaranteed that my attendance would be confidential. None of what I said would ever be reported publicly. He declined to name the journalists who would be there but described them as "other distinguished members of the Washington press corps." The enterprise smelled odd. Deciding to investigate, I accepted Shadrake's offer. Besides, I could use the money.

The "panel" was held the following evening at one of those sterile mini-corporate centers that dot the landscape of suburban Washington. My distinguished colleagues and I were directed to a sandwichless conference room in the offices of a business called House Market Research. Our round table included Mel and Beth of *U.S. News & World Report*, Sherry of *The Washingtonian* magazine, Ron of *The Washington Times*, Wendy from WRC-TV, Jack from WRC-Radio, Len from WMAL-Radio, Glenn from *Armed Forces Journal International*, Elena of W-LITE-Radio and Tom, who works for a business newsletter. I use first names for two reasons: I feel I owe my comrades, who were promised discretion, a tissue of privacy; also, I didn't catch their last names. The little placards that were placed in front of us bore only given names.

Carl, a bright-eyed *thirtysomething*esque fellow in shirtsleeves, was our "moderator." He pointed out the microphones in the ceiling and revealed that behind the dark-glass mirror that formed one wall were people observing us, including the client. *The client?* Carl continued. We were a focus group and would be shown mock-ups of various ads. Our job was to tell him (and those on the other side of the looking glass) what we thought of the advertisements.

This was nothing new. Carl said he had run other focus groups of reporters—as well as panels made up of government officials and business professionals—and some of my fellow journalists indicated that this was not their first time. Carl then laid out the routine. "We are not talking about anything controversial," he maintained. We would not be identified by our last name. Our comments would be used only in the most general way, such as "the Washington media community thought . . ." Then he handed out, face-down, copies of a proposed ad. At his command, we were to turn over the paste-up and blurt out our gut reactions. "Emotionally, how does this ad make you feel?" Carl asked, supplying guidance. People just like us, he added, were the target audience for these pitches.

We flipped and encountered a two-page spread. Next to photographs—seemingly of oil drops—that made little sense

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was a headline about some new technology that "may" double the world's supply of oil. On the bottom of the page was the insignia for BP, the oil company. "Flexibility is our best ability," the motto read. O.K., an upbeat Carl asked, how many of you would stop to read the ad? No way, said Beth. It was too scientific. Mel disagreed: "It has a catchy headline." The only reason to stop to read it, I remarked, would be to figure out the scam. Then came another BP ad, which showed workers cleaning up a beach and a headline reading, "An oil spill happens by accident. A swift response doesn't." The copy boasted that BP had "recently" established a crisis response center to deal with oil spills and that—imagine this—the center was equipped with fax machines, telephones and a computer. Most of the reactions were not very friendly. Wendy found BP's attempt to score public relations points in this manner "outrageous." Ron was angered. But Len offered the response sought by the ad's creators: "BP is trying to say that what happened to Exxon will not happen to it."

Carl: 'I don't hear from you a willingness to believe any oil company can be different.'

Then came a winner: a mock-up with a nifty photograph of an oil tanker being guided by two tugboats through Alaska's Prince William Sound. The headline noted that the best way to deal with an oil spill is to prevent one. "This ad conveys environmental responsibility," Glenn piped up. "It says BP's got things under control," someone else noted. Then Carl asked what we thought of the series of ads, which would run as a campaign. Most of us were unimpressed, though Len thought the ads demonstrated that BP is an industry and environmental leader. Determined not to say anything that might be of any real use to the people behind the mirror, I muttered that these ads illustrate only that BP is worried about its image and that I saw no reason why any thinking person would allow his or her view of the company to be influenced by them. There was nothing in them, for instance, about double hulls on tankers. Carl didn't look pleased.

This was the drill for two more sets of BP ads. Quite obviously, one or more advertising firms had developed three competing campaigns. Carl wanted to know which campaign best portrayed a company that was "versatile and innovative, not stodgy." Real-life equivalents of Michael Steadman and Elliot Weston must have been pacing back and forth in the darkened observation room as the journalists critiqued the ads and thus facilitated BP's admittedly difficult task of selling itself as something other than an oil company in it only for the money. Members of the group noted which photographs caught their eye, what message was more compelling. An ad claiming that the company had its own environmentalists working in the Alaskan tundra to minimize the ecological impact of its operations and in urban areas to preserve housing—that's what it said—earned some favorable reviews. "I would be drawn to this," Elena remarked. Another showed a large, gripping photograph of an African-American teenager. "He can still remember his senior year of high school," the headline said. "All four days." The mock-up praised a BP program in Cleveland—described in the vaguest of terms—that aimed to keep kids in school. This went over well. It displayed "social responsibility," Wendy said. One cynic wondered just how much BP cares about someone in the inner city. "At least it's a new approach," Beth commented.

By now Carl had become a bit exasperated by the skepticism displayed by some. He complained that panelists had at different times both expressed the sentiment that BP should not dare to herald its purported environmental concerns and then responded positively to some ads that touched on environmental issues. How should an oil company promote its environmental credentials? he asked. "When oil companies talk about the environment," an obliging Ron said, "if they don't use words like responsibility or prevention their credibility goes way down."

Carl zeroed in on me. "I don't hear from you," he said somewhat sadly, "a willingness to believe that any oil company can be different from any other company." Sure, it's possible—just possible—that one might stand out, I answered. But it would be foolish to conclude that based on the promotional campaign of the company itself. Carl and I tangled a few other times. Asked to evaluate the tone of one proposed campaign, I answered that the mock-ups only caused me to question why the company wasn't promoting itself by guaranteeing that it will provide the best service at the lowest price. "Isn't that the most effective way for a company to sell itself?" C'mon, Len interrupted, "they're image ads."

We spent two hours at this. At one point Carl asked us to compare four potential slogans: "Where the unexpected isn't," "Running on creative energy," "Energy to change" and the one about flexibility. The group split evenly between the two tag-lines mentioning "energy." A unanimous thumbs down was given to the logo used in all the ads. "It looks like a BP oil barrel turning into a Slinky," someone observed. We all laughed. Well, replied Carl, it was. Flexibility—a Slinky. Oh, we mumbled, we get it.

The panel then reviewed a fourth and final campaign based on 1974 photos of people lining up for gas. The copy reported that BP was looking for more oil in Alaska (without noting it probably had its eye on what is now a protected wildlife area) and urged readers to join with BP in pressing the Administration to release oil from the strategic petroleum reserve. The copy didn't explain why BP was pushing for this. These ads earned some good reviews. I wondered aloud what was in it for the company, since that could drive down the price of gasoline. Carl shot me an angry look.

At the end of our panel discussion, Carl reported that of all the focus groups he had moderated those composed of journalists tended to be the most cynical. That troubled

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him. Can't an oil company convince you that it is concerned about the environment? he asked plaintively. That it has a decent record? Why is that so hard to do? "You know," he said, "I was a communications major. I went through the same journalism classes you did." He needed it spelled out for him. No one has a tougher pitch to make than oil companies, a panelist explained. "Actions, not words," came another reply. One reporter lumped oil companies together with tobacco companies as the twin towers of corporate malfeasance. Carl cringed. The oil companies had a long way to go before what they said would be accepted at face value, someone else remarked. Carl shrugged and said no more.

Despite our host's downhearted appearance, this group had helped BP. Although many of the comments were negative—and may have meant misery for some not-so-hot ad director sitting in the shadows—they undoubtedly would be of use to BP's propagandists. Perhaps even my own remarks had triggered some diabolical thought in the mind of one of Carl's unseen colleagues. Carl and BP should have known better than to expect positive reactions from us, but if they listened carefully the session could be extremely valuable for them. The reporters in the room, however, should have known better than to accept Shadrake's invitation. By serving as a test audience for the image enhancers of BP, they aided and abetted a business laboring to find the best way to manipulate information and the truth. □

Farrakhan

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

gion. That vision and program, as well as his personal stature, grew from the soil of black nationalist politics in the civil rights/black power era. To make sense of Farrakhan requires situating him within the organizational and ideological contexts from which he emerged. Doing so, moreover, indicates that his anti-Semitism and whatever he might think of whites in general are ephemeral in comparison with the truly dangerous tendencies he represents.

In the early 1960s, as Louis X, Farrakhan was minister of the Nation of Islam's important Boston mosque and a kind of understudy to Malcolm X. He sided conspicuously with Elijah Muhammad, founder and "Messenger" of the Nation, against Malcolm in the bitter 1963-65 conflict that ended with the latter's murder. Farrakhan replaced Malcolm as minister of the Harlem mosque and later became Muhammad's national representative.

The Messenger's core teachings include claims that blacks were the world's "original" race, from which all others derived; that black Americans are descended from an ancient, "lost" Asian tribe; that the white race originated from a demonic laboratory experiment and that Elijah Muhammad was divinely inspired. Following nationalist convention, the Muslims advocate the subordination of women, drawing on a rhetoric of domesticity, moral purity and male responsibility;

This is the first of two articles. Adolph Reed Jr. is professor of political science at Yale University.

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predictably, they denounce feminism and gay rights as white decadence and as strategies to undermine black unity and moral fiber.

The Nation's secular program has always focused on "nation building," which in practice has meant business development and the creation of separate schools and other institutions. Those activities have been harnessed to the ultimate goal of political separation and the formation of an independent state. Under Muhammad that goal remained inchoate, appearing mainly as a millenarian dream, but for Farrakhan it figures more directly into programmatic rhetoric. Discussion of the proposed state's citizenry characteristically elides the distinction between the membership of the Nation of Islam and black Americans in general, but Farrakhan recently has indicated that one possible model entails putting the former in charge of the latter. The nation-building agenda also reinforces the organization's natalist ideology and longstanding opposition to abortion, which both Muhammad and Farrakhan have denounced as genocidal as well as immoral.

When W.D. Muhammad inherited the Nation of Islam, it was stymied by a fundamental contradiction.

Farrakhan rose to prominence during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Muhammad's Nation was trying to become more visible in public life and to establish a greater presence in the black activist arena. As Muhammad's representative, he participated in national black political forums, addressed the 1970 Pan-African Congress of nationalist activists (as did first-time black Mayors Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, and Kenneth Gibson of Newark; Ralph Abernathy; National Urban League director Whitney Young Jr.; Jesse Jackson and others) and frequently spoke on black college campuses. During that period the Nation also expanded its business development agenda, which until then had centered mainly on mom-and-pop restaurants, takeout sandwich and baked goods shops, cut-and-sew operations catering to the organization's members (to satisfy the Muslim dress code) and the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*. The Nation unveiled a set of ambitious goals, including establishment of agribusiness in the South, a medical complex in Chicago and large-scale international commerce anchored by fish imports from Peru. There was even talk that Muhammad would take advantage of Richard Nixon's definition of "black power" as "black capitalism" and apply for funds from minority economic development programs in the Office of Economic Opportunity or the Small Business Administration.

Two personal encounters I had with Farrakhan in late 1970 and early 1971 neatly reflect the discordant aspects of the Nation of Islam's thrust then and his place in it. One was a speech he gave at the predominantly black Fayetteville State University in North Carolina, where he scored mainstream civil rights spokespersons for their spinelessness and lack of vision. Of Ralph Abernathy's pledge to pursue King's "dream" as his successor at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Farrakhan quipped, "Talking about dreaming somebody else's dream! Don't you know that when you're dreaming, you're *asleep*? *Wake up*, black man!" And he chastised his mainly student audience for putative moral weakness. "Just as a bootmaker molds a boot, so the teacher molds the hearts and minds of the youth of our nation," he said, playing on the institution's history as a teachers' college. "And what are you going to teach them, *drunkard*? What are you going to teach them, *dope fiend*? What are you going to teach them, *foul, frivolous woman* who will lie down with a teacher to get a passing grade?" (Note that the woman, not the teacher, is his target.) With striking theatricality and stage presence, he punctuated each charge by pointing to a different section of the auditorium, as if exposing particular culprits.

The second encounter came soon thereafter. Along with other field-staff members of the North Carolina-based Foundation for Community Development, I was called in to Durham to attend a meeting with Farrakhan. He had come to the area as Muhammad's delegate, mainly to pursue contacts with officials of a well-established black bank and the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, then one of the largest black-owned businesses in the United States. He also wanted to examine the operations of the community development corporation that our agency had helped the local poor-people's organization create. At the meeting his demeanor was reserved, almost stilted, and he seemed (or tried to seem) in thrall to an image of black Durham as a center for business enterprise. (He had attended college in Winston-Salem during the early 1950s and quite likely imbibed that image then.) Although he made perfunctory gestures of appreciation for our reputation for grass-roots activism and black-power radicalism, he expressed only polite interest in the participatory and cooperative aspects of our community development approach. He was not much moved by the idea of organizing poor people to act on their own behalf.

While the Nation seemed to be growing and consolidating itself as a corporate enterprise, many of us in movement circles who watched from the outside wondered then how it would resolve the evident tension between its flamboyant rhetorical posture, so clear that night at Fayetteville State, and its very conventional business aspirations. Central in our minds was anticipation of the succession crisis likely to occur when Muhammad, who in 1970 was already a feeble septuagenarian, died or stepped down. For not only could Muslim operatives be seen hanging out with denizens of the underworld, but sectarian zealotry often condoned a strong-arm style.

The Uhuru Kitabu bookstore in Philadelphia, for example, was firebombed in 1970 when its proprietors—former Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee workers—refused to remove a Malcolm X poster from the store's window after threats from local Muslims. In Atlanta in 1971 a dispute between Muslims and Black Panthers over turf rights for street-corner newspaper hawking erupted into a hundred-person

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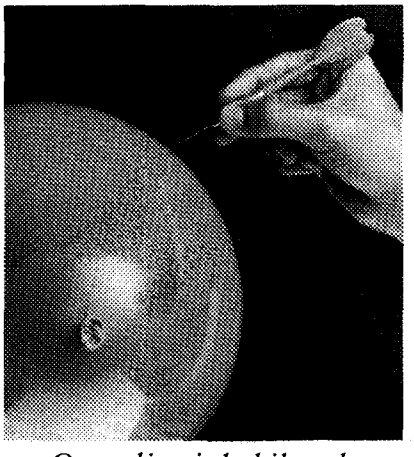

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brawl. In 1972 strife within New York's Temple Number 7 culminated in a three-hour fight and shootout that began in the mosque and spilled outside. A purge of remaining Malcolm X loyalists followed in New York and elsewhere, and factions within the Nation were implicated in assassinations of outspoken followers of Malcolm in Boston and in Newark, where the presiding minister of the mosque was gunned down.

Most chilling, in January 1973 a simmering theological dispute with members of the Hanafi Islamic sect in Washington ignited into an attack of which only zealots or hardened killers are capable. Seven Hanafis were murdered in their 16th Street residence, owned by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; five of the victims were children, including babies who were drowned in the bathtub. (The Hanafis held the Nation responsible and four years later occupied a government building and B'nai B'rith center and took hostages to press their demands for retribution.)

In that climate it was reasonable to worry, upon Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, that the friction might lead to open warfare among the organization's contending factions, particularly between those identified with Farrakhan, who stood for the primacy of ideology, and the Messenger's son Wallace (Warith) Deen Muhammad, who had been linked much more with the Nation's business operations than with its ideological mission. Consequences of that sort did not materialize, and W.D. succeeded his father without apparent conflict, or at least with no immediate, publicly noticeable disruption.

The tension between the two agendas inevitably came to a head, however. Since the early 1970s the Nation had sought explicitly to recruit a middle-class membership as part of its drive for economic development. College students and professionals who joined were likely to be rewarded with responsible positions in the administrative hierarchy, but the Nation had only limited success in gaining petit-bourgeois adherents. It was, after all, a bit much to expect a college-educated constituency to accept as religious principle that the pig is a hybrid of the dog, the cat and the rat or that whites derive from an evil wizard's botched experiment on subhuman creatures.

At the same time, instability grew in the Muslim business operations. For whatever reasons—probably among them was a reluctance to open records to outside scrutiny—the organization retreated from its ambivalent interest in pursuing federal economic-development support. Yet the projects on the board required both considerable specialized expertise and capitalization surpassing the Nation's liquidity. A $3 million "loan" from the Libyan government in 1972 was a stopgap. Despite its ideological boost as a statement of Islamic solidarity, however, the Libyan deal was also a signal that the Messenger Muhammad could not finance his bold schemes internally and was unwilling to do so through regular outside sources.

The desire to broaden the Nation's class base rested on more than a need for expertise. The early newspaper and the bean pie, restaurant and fish ventures relied on the super-exploitation of members' labor. The religio-racial ideology—much like family ideology in a mom-and-pop store—could impose on members, at least in the short run, jobs offering low wages, no benefits and sometimes even no wages. But while it might help keep a newspaper solvent or finance a new restaurant, that ideologically driven accumulation strategy could not begin to support hospital construction or complex international commerce. Tithes or direct investment by a more affluent membership might better help meet capital needs.

Thus, when W.D. Muhammad inherited the Nation of Islam, it was stymied by a fundamental contradiction: The motors of its success—the religio-racial ideology, hermetic separatism and primitive strategy of capital accumulation—had become impediments to realizing the objectives that success had spawned. Negotiating the contradiction was constrained, moreover, by Farrakhan, who constituted himself on the right flank as guardian of the Messenger's orthodoxy, ready to challenge deviations.

Those contrary tendencies coexisted no more than three years. Before the split became public knowledge Muhammad had introduced sweeping changes. He repudiated his father's idiosyncratic religious doctrines—no more Yacub, the evil wizard—in favor of conventional Islamic beliefs. He changed the sect's name to the World Community of Islam in the West to reflect a move toward traditional Islam. He rejected the Messenger's insistence on abstaining from secular politics; in-

Louis Farrakhan on the Persian Gulf: 'Mr. Bush, Send Your Son'

Farrakhan has denounced in strident terms the Bush Administration's troop deployment and saber rattling in the Persian Gulf. In the December 10 issue of *The Final Call*, he attacked Bush for cynically sending "Blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, Hispanics and even poor white boys and girls" to fight a possible war motivated only by "greed, material gain and to keep people in power [in the region] who bow down to the will of America." But he stopped short of calling for an immediate withdrawal of troops and had nothing to say about Saddam Hussein's actions. So far, he has appealed to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia—as a fellow Muslim and not an enemy—to ask the United States to withdraw its troops, and he pledges to mount an antiwar campaign if the United States refuses to comply with such a request. By invoking Islamic solidarity and carefully avoiding any expression of support for Saddam or any hint of criticism of the deposed Kuwaiti regime or the Saudis, Farrakhan shows a concern not to alienate any possible Arab or Muslim source of good will. His linking of his threat to mobilize against the war to such an unlikely condition reflects a reluctance to put to a public test his claim to be a major force in black American political life. Farrakhan has been successful in filling auditoriums and titillating rallies, but he has neither won mass adherence to the Nation of Islam nor ever demonstrated a capacity to galvanize popular action toward any end. Thus on the gulf he has opted for a characteristic Nation of Islam stance: a militant rhetorical posture that preserves an aversion to real political mobilization. A.R.

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stead, he actively urged political participation. In 1976 Muhammad gave up on the goal of economic independence, dismantled the group's holdings and considered seeking Small Business Administration assistance for member-entrepreneurs. (Rumor has it that titles to all the Nation's assets were held not by the organization but by the Messenger himself, who died intestate. Supposedly, W.D. hastened to sell off everything and divided the proceeds equally among all his father's legitimate and illegitimate offspring.)

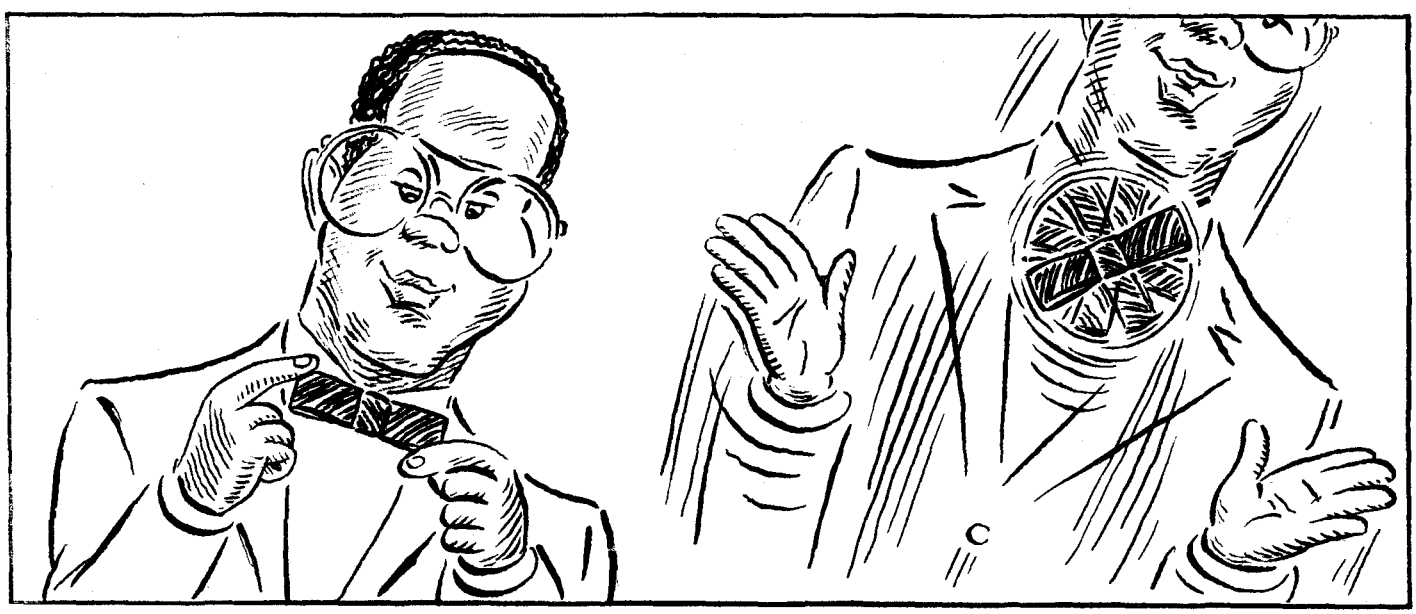
W.D. had been a very close ally of Malcolm X, reputedly even through the break with his own father, and within his first year as leader of the organization he renamed the Harlem mosque in Malcolm's honor. To Farrakhan's partisans, who often pointed to W.D.'s support for Malcolm as evidence of filial impiety, that gesture must have affirmed suspicions of his blasphemous inclinations. More strain must have developed from W.D.'s proclamation in 1975 that whites thenceforth would be welcome as members of the sect. In 1978 Farrakhan announced his departure and the formation of a new Nation of Islam on the basis of the Messenger's original teachings. In 1985 the World Community of Islam in the West officially disbanded, leaving Farrakhan's group as Elijah Muhammad's sole organizational legacy.

Through the early 1980s Farrakhan maintained a relatively low profile as he built his organization by replicating the old Nation's forms and cultivating a membership drawn from its main social base on the margins of black working-class life. He re-established the Fruit of Islam, the paramilitary security force, and he restored the old ideology, Yacub and all. He even concocted a version of the old bean pie–and–fish economic development formula via Power Products, a line of household and personal items. (To date, the line has not done well, and Farrakhan seems not to have given it much attention.) As if to underscore his loyalty to the elder Muhammad's vision, Farrakhan resumed his old title, national representative of the Honorable Eli ah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. The chief public signal of the Nation of Islam's return was the appearance of young men on inner-city streets wearing the group's distinctive suit and bow tie and aggressively selling the *Final Call* newspaper, which, but for the different title, follows the format of the old *Muhammad Speaks*.

The original Nation of Islam had grown in prominence in the years after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision because the organization, primarily through Malcolm, chose to operate within the discursive realm created by the developing activist movement. Debate about politics and racial strategy—at widely varying levels of sophistication—was extensive, and the rising tide of activism lifted all ideological and organizational boats.

In the early 1980s, though, there was no hint of a popular movement, and black political discourse had withered to fit entirely within the frame of elite-centered agendas for race-relations engineering. The cutting edge of racial advocacy, for example, was what political scientist Earl Picard described astutely at the time as the "corporate intervention strategy," pioneered by Jesse Jackson at Operation PUSH and adopted with less rhetorical flair by the National Urban League and the N.A.A.C.P. This strategy consisted in using the threat of consumer boycott to induce corporations to enter into "covenants" binding them to hire black managers, contract with black vendors, deposit in black banks and recruit black franchisees. (For a while, the N.A.A.C.P. concentrated on Hollywood, identifying the fate of the race with its representation in the film industry.) At the same time Ronald Reagan was pressing ahead with a rhetoric and battle plan steeped in racial revanchism, and official black opposition ranged from feeble to incoherent. In that context, the Fruit of Islam selling newspapers outside the supermarket looked for all the world like living anachronisms.

In the race for the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination, however, Farrakhan demonstrated the new Nation of Islam's political departure from the old. Unlike Elijah Muhammad, Farrakhan did not remain publicly aloof from electoral politics. He openly supported Jackson's candidacy and even provided him with a Fruit of Islam security force. Because of Farrakhan's and the Nation's long association with anti-Semitic rhetoric, his closeness to Jackson was thrown into relief in the wake of the "Hymietown" controversy.



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Milton Coleman, the *Washington Post* reporter who disclosed Jackson's remarks, was condemned widely as a race traitor, but Farrakhan raised the ante: "We're going to make an example of Milton Coleman. One day soon, we will punish you by death, because you are interfering with the future of our babies—for white people and against the good of yourself and your own people. This is a fitting punishment for such dogs." (Farrakhan has always denied he made these remarks.)

That inflamed rhetoric, along with Farrakhan's reference to Judaism as a "gutter religion," prodded a temporizing Jackson to distance himself publicly from Farrakhan, and the incident made sensationalistic copy throughout the information industry. For those with longer memories Farrakhan's attack on Coleman was a chilling reminder of the thuggish currents of the past. Indeed, his theretofore most notoriously threatening pronouncement—against Malcolm X—had set a frightening precedent. In December 1964 he wrote in *Muhammad Speaks*:

> Only those who wish to be led to hell, or to their doom, will follow Malcolm. The die is set and Malcolm shall not escape, especially after such foolish talk about his benefactor in trying to rob him of the divine glory which Allah has bestowed upon him. Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death—and would have met with death if it had not been for Muhammad's confidence in Allah for victory over the enemies.

Two months later Malcolm was assassinated.

In retrospect, the significance of the Milton Coleman incident lay in how it propelled Farrakhan into the new, mass-mediated space in Afro-American politics first carved out by Jesse Jackson. Jackson's 1984 campaign oscillated between simplistic racial appeals ("It's our turn now!") and claims to represent some larger "moral force." As I have argued in *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon*, that oscillation was rooted in a contradiction between the campaign's public posture as the crest of a broadly based social movement and the reality that it could rely on black votes only. The pressure to increase the black vote justified a mobilization strategy that often approached pure demagogy. In an August 1984 interview with *Ebony*, Jackson described himself as the carrier of "the emotions and self-respect and inner security of the whole race." The messianism implicit in that perception of his racial role appeared more clearly in his insinuation in that same interview that a Virginia supporter's terminal cancer was cured by going to a Jackson rally. In the midst of the Reagan counterrevolution and black elites' typically uninspired and ineffectual responses, that sort of demagogic appeal found a popular audience. With no more promising agenda available, racial cheerleading at least offered a soothing catharsis. The promise of deliverance by proxy, of racial absorption into Jackson's persona, consoled some with simple explanations and apparently easy remedies ("If all black people could just get together behind Jesse . . .").

But between 1984 and 1988 Jackson moved to consolidate his position as a racial broker in mainstream national politics and to expand his domain to include putative representation of all the "locked out." That shift required soft-pedaling the race line, and instead of making sharp denunciations of the nasty grass-roots racism expressed in Howard Beach and Forsyth County, Georgia, he attempted to invoke the common interests of poor whites and poor blacks. Jackson's transition from the posture of militant insurgent to a more subdued insider's style left vacant the specific racial space that he had created and that had proved to be marketable. Louis Farrakhan's emergence as a national political figure is largely the story of his efforts to replace Jackson as central embodiment and broker of the black race-nationalist political persona. Those efforts began, at least symbolically, with Jackson's grudging acquiescence to white pressure to criticize Farrakhan after the "Hymietown" incident.

The notoriety acquired in that incident fueled Farrakhan's rise in two ways. First, it simply increased his name recognition, especially among a younger generation with no recollection of the old Nation of Islam and his role therein. Second, the heavy barrage of sensationalistic coverage and the sanctimonious white response to the affair afforded an image of Farrakhan and Jackson joined in racial martyrdom. Repudiation of Farrakhan has become a litmus test imposed by white opinion makers for black participation in mainstream politics, and many blacks perceive the test as a humiliating power play. Farrakhan's messianic pretensions, moreover, give him a style something like a counterpunching boxer, and he deftly turned the assault on him into evidence of his authenticity as a race leader. Whites and their agents, the argument goes, expend so much energy on discrediting him because he is a genuine advocate of black interests and thus a threat to white racial domination. In that view, the more he is attacked, the greater his authenticity and the more emphatically he must be defended.

Farrakhan hardly invented this style. Jackson and his black supporters have routinely dismissed criticism by accusing critics of either racism or race treason. Marion Barry, Gus Savage and legions of less prominent malefactors have wrapped themselves in red, black and green rhetoric to conceal abuses of public trust or other failings. Nor is the practice an "African survival." Jimmy Swaggart, Billy James Hargis, Richard Nixon and Oliver North all claim to have been beleaguered by a comparable conspiracy of liberal-communists. Farrakhan stands out because he has been cast in our public theater—like Qaddafi and Noriega, both of whom he has defended—as a figure of almost cartoonishly demonic proportions. He has become uniquely notorious because his inflammatory nationalist persona has helped to center public discussion of Afro-American politics on the only issue (except affirmative action, of course) about which most whites ever show much concern: What do blacks think of whites? □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Tomorrow Never Knows

GAIL COLLINS

Here we are, launched into the nineties, and before long nobody's going to care. The year 2000 is just around the corner. As it inches closer, the news media will be far too busy compiling Nostradamus's predictions of the end of the world to care much about this decade.

It won't be the first time Americans have gotten caught up in Year 2000 fever. Exactly a century ago, the United States was at the peak of an obsession with the turn of the millennium. People believed that by the year 2000, things were going to be terrific—by the 1990s, certainly, poverty would have long since been abolished. Social divisions would have evaporated and the air would have been cleaned up. And of course there would be world peace, possibly a world government. Opinion differed on whether people would have managed to abolish housework.

The book that fired up this enthusiasm was *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy's novel about a man who falls asleep in the nineteenth century and wakes up in Boston on September 10, 2000. "The world now is heaven compared with what it was in your day," a resident assures Bellamy's hero. "The only feeling you will have after a little while will be one of thankfulness to God that your life in that age was so strangely cut off, to be returned to you in this."

Looking Backward was published in 1888, when middle-class Americans were terrified by the possibility of working-class violence and appalled by the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age. *Looking Backward* told them that this was all going to change—that by the year 2000 there would be no poor, no rich. People would all work together for the common good and receive equal shares in the national product.

That was what the public wanted to hear. By 1900, *Looking Backward* had sold more copies than any book written in the United States except *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was translated into more than twenty languages. By the early nineties, at least 165 Bellamy clubs had been formed around the United States to lobby for political changes that would transform the country into the sort of place *Looking Backward* describes.

Bellamy called this movement Nationalism. (The reference was to nationalizing industry, not promoting national interests. Indeed, the future America he portrayed was on the brink of entering into a world government.) A minister's son from Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, Bellamy was caught up in the fervor his book had generated. Moving leftward by the hour, he became an ardent spokesperson for the labor movement and universal suffrage, neither of which gets much support in the novel.

More American workers read Looking Backward *than ever made it through Marx.*

The excitement over *Looking Backward* inspired dozens of other visions of what the year 2000 would be like. Novels about white middle-class Victorians who fall asleep and wake up a century later became all the rage: "Wherever I looked there stood only these ten-story palaces, varied in decoration, surrounded by fruit trees, flower beds, vases, statues, and marble seats" (the hero of Paul DeVinne's *The Day of Prosperity*, after waking up in New York City). "[England] is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt" (said to the narrator of William Morris's *News From Nowhere* after he wakes up in Hammersmith).

The Nationalist Clubs aligned themselves with the Populist Party, and succumbed as the party did to the combined forces of the Spanish-American War and the distinctly nonutopian candidacy of William Jennings Bryan, whom the Populists endorsed. But *Looking Backward* and its clones had a more enduring impact. In 1935, when Columbia University asked John Dewey, Charles Beard and *Atlantic Monthly* editor Edward Weeks to list the twenty-five most influential books of the previous half-century, all three put *Das Kapital* first and *Looking Backward* right behind it. And far more American workers read *Looking Backward* than ever made it through Marx. The book was "debated by all down to the bootblack on the corner," reported Henry Demarest Lloyd in 1894.

There is virtually no action in *Looking Backward*, and Bellamy is even worse on description than he is on dialogue. Still, readers were fascinated with his picture of society in the year 2000—from the day-to-day practicalities ("Our washing is all done at public laundries at excessively cheap rates, and our cooking at public kitchens") to his grand vision of an economy in which all business has been swallowed up into one Great Trust run by the state and the work force transformed into an eager industrial army of patriotic citizens.

The plot of *Looking Backward* is minimal: Julian West, 30-year-old Bostonian circa 1887, is treated for insomnia by a sympathetic hypnotist who overachieves; West wakes up 113 years later in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Leete, falls in love with their radiant daughter Edith, and spends the entire book listening to his new family explain how Boston has come to be a paradise on earth.

"There was absolutely no violence," Dr. Leete tells his son-in-law to be. "The change had been long foreseen. Public opinion had become fully ripe for it." The process by which capitalism has been made to go away, in fact, gets as short a shrift as the process by which Julian survived a 113-year nap without aging.

In the year 2000, all citizens are encouraged to stay in school until they're 21, when they are mustered into the Industrial Army and spend a few years waiting on tables and doing menial labor while they choose an area of specialization. People generally get to follow whatever occupation they prefer—if too many people want to be welders, and too few miners, the government just reduces the mining workweek until it becomes an attractive profession. Everybody retires at 45. "Middle age and what you would have called old age are considered, rather than youth, the enviable time of life," says Dr. Leete. "As eager boys in your day anticipated 21, so men nowadays look forward to 45."

The crux of Bellamy's social organization is its system of compensation.

Gail Collins is co-author of The Millennium Book *(Doubleday).*

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The difference between the Nationalist movement and socialism, Bellamy would write later, is that Nationalists believe each citizen's share of the national product should be "not merely equitable, whatever that term may mean, but always and absolutely equal." Everyone gets exactly the same salary in Boston circa 2000, because everyone tries their hardest. Currency has been abolished in favor of credit cards citizens can use in their neighborhood shopping malls—each of which contains every single item of goods the government has to offer. The lame, the retarded, the insane all have credit cards of their own.

The world of 2000 Bellamy describes is socially transformed but technologically pretty much like the one in which Julian West fell asleep. Bellamy is almost Marcusian in his faith that technical progress would make the world of 2000 prosperous and its citizens basically a leisure class, but the postindustrial revolution is working its magic offstage. We learn that factories are no longer dirty but we never see them in action. The Leetes have radios—even clock radios—and something resembling stereo headphones. Electric heat and light have eliminated the pollution and dirt associated with coal fires. And packages can be delivered across town in an instant, thanks to the system of pneumatic tubes. But if life is more pleasant and convenient, it is because society has been reorganized to make it so. The industrial army does the washing and the cooking, not washer-dryers and microwave ovens.

It was social progress, not spaceships, that people thought about when they envisioned the future that is now our present. Even H.G. Wells, commissioned by the *North American Review* in 1900 to write a six-part series on life in 2000, spent more time rambling on about political organizations than about machines. (Wells did anticipate the automobile age, but he predicted that highways would be private, owned by the car companies and reserved strictly for the autos they made.) Since Bellamy's age felt more threatened by social chaos than regulation, there is no suggestion in *Looking Backward* that a state responsible for everything from setting the number of hours in a welder's workweek to deciding how many colors of muslin will be produced for the palatial shopping marts could become overweening. One of the "response" novels, *The Day of Prosperity*, describes a happy world in which citizens are required to carry around 200-

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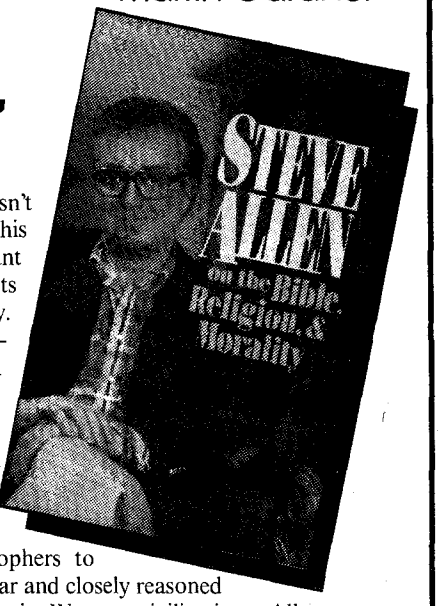
Steve Allen on the Bible, Religion, and Morality



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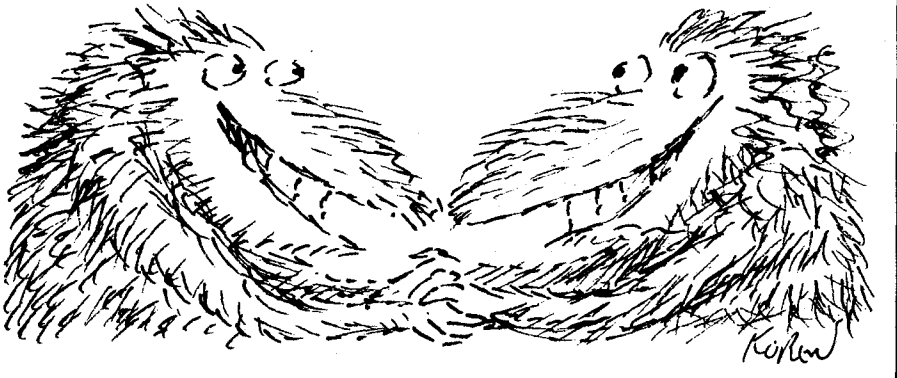

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page passports, recounting their personal histories in minute detail. Nobody seems to mind.

Bellamy's utopia is peculiarly American: a socialist brotherhood in which everyone works together, shares everything, yet manages to live in privacy so absolute it borders on isolation. The Leetes take West to their communal dining hall ("the magnificent architecture and richness of embellishment astonished me"), where each family eats in its own private room. Public gatherings—operas, symphonies, even church services—seem to have been eliminated in favor of radio broadcasts. ("How perfectly exasperating it must have been, for the sake of a piece or two of music that suited you, to have to sit for hours listening to what you did not care for!") Throughout the book, West manages to tour the city and acquaint himself with the Boston of the future without ever speaking to anyone except the Leetes, or encountering any blacks, Catholics or other descendants of the working class.

The authors of response novels took all sorts of exceptions to Bellamy's portrait in their own descriptions of utopia in the year 2000. The most famous response, Marxist poet William Morris's *News From Nowhere*, rejects the shrinking workweeks and technologically driven prosperity in favor of a sort of medieval communism. His hero falls asleep and wakes up in an England where citizens live in pretty villages, dine in a common hall and enjoy working with their hands. When bookish youngsters "see most people about them engaged in genuinely amusing work, like house-building and street-paving, and gardening, and the like, that is what they want to be doing," explains a local resident.

The state has withered away—Parliament is used to store manure—and criminality has disappeared with the elimination of private property. None of this came easy, Morris's hero is told. England had drifted into state socialism in the twentieth century, but a terrible depression caused the inefficient state factories to collapse in 1952. All this was followed by a massacre of the workers, revolution, strikes and civil war. Now the industrial age has been repealed. People live in wood-and-plastic cottages or communally in castles, farming and doing handicrafts.

On the other hand, the New Yorkers Paul DeVinne describes in *The Day of Prosperity* work only four hours a day, nine months a year, and live in ten-story hotels, dining off gold and silver dishes, on food sent up from the hotel kitchen. (The obsession with eating in private seems impossible to shake, but DeVinne's inhabitants of the year 2000 do go to public performances—tickets for which are always available at the last minute.) Morningside Park has been replaced by a 700-foot-tall Statue of Liberty "standing upon the great gold dome of a colossal building of vast extent and classic style." The East Side of Manhattan is nothing but palaces, fruit trees and statues (made, we are told, out of synthetic marble).

There is no money, no credit cards. Everything you could possibly want is available for free at the hotel, ordered daily by the concierge. Everyone wears the same clothes, although adults get to pick their own color. Children are kept in hotel dormitories until they're shipped off to boarding school at 14. There is only one newspaper per city, and it's hard to imagine what's in it. "You see, we have no conflicting political parties, we have no private firms to advertise, no people seeking employment, no wars to carry on, and we do not trouble ourselves about matters which are entirely private, such as births, engagements, marriages, and deaths."

Bellamy's age was the last in which futuristic novels would take such an optimistic bent. The twentieth century, although it brought far more technological progress than people a century ago anticipated, has soured our futuristic novelists. By the time we had endured a world war and a Great Depression, they were wavering between visions of apocalyptic savagery and of Big Brother dictatorships. But a hundred years ago, people believed in happy endings. When, in

SNOWBOUND AT THE BAR 2,
BELOW WINDING STAIR MOUNTAIN, 1943

It came from the southwest so fast it caught
us unaware, the wind whipping the autumn
snow across the road barely visible in
the early dark of evening, ten miles from
town and a lonely five from the valley homes.

I could hear the engine groan down the soft
road. My eyes squinted for Red Wing's barn roof
I knew should loom like a ship in fog around
the hairpin curve. For hours it seemed we crawled
along the mountain's side in a toy that hauled

ten times its weight, so heavy the bus in snow.
Then we saw the barn and stopped. The road
no longer passable, we the children
in great delight were herded across a wide
expanse of moonlit shadows, black on white.

They fed us blackeyed peas and sauerkraut,
and Red Wing played guitar and told us about
the wolves we heard howling outside the circle
of light the Bar 2 gave off. Hired hands brought
us blankets, spread them near the fire, their boots

heavy with the unexpected snow. Before
I drifted into sleep I heard the roar
of static on Red Wing's battery radio,
then Gabriel Heater's mournful voice full
of drudging war: no end in sight this fall.

Morning brought us back into a brighter world,
and long before the sun was high we hurled
ourselves into the rancher's white haystack,
pretending Bavarian alps could never stop
such allies as we were from reaching the top.

Jim Barnes

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1888, a reviewer complained that society would need far more than a century to reach the utopia Bellamy was describing, the author added a postscript to future editions. "All thoughtful men agree that the present aspect of society is portentous of great changes. The only question is, whether they will be for the better or the worse," he wrote. "*Looking Backward* was written in the belief that the Golden Age lies before us and not behind us, and is not far away. Our children will surely see it, and we, too, who are already men and women if we deserve it by our faith and by our works."

Looking backward now from Bellamy's future, the saddest thing is not that we have failed to create the utopia he imagined but that we have stopped dreaming up utopias of our own. □

Lighting the Closet

MARK EDMUNDSON

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE CLOSET. *By Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. University of California Press. 258 pp. $24.95.*

On the subject of sexual oppression—as on a number of other things—Gore Vidal is difficult to refute. Compressed into a few urbane sentences, his view goes like this: "There is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person. There are only homo- or heterosexual acts. Most people are a mixture of impulses if not practices, and what anyone does with a willing partner is of no social or cosmic significance." Reasonable enough. But depite the Freudian Revolution, the Aquarian Age and the existence today of surpassingly sane views like Vidal's, erotic life, for many, remains fraught with guilt and fear.

It has been said that in the twentieth century an erotic life is the closest thing many of us have to what in times past was called a spiritual life. And where there's a spiritual life there are likely to be commandments, transgressions, guilt and penance. One feels the need for priests. The possibility exists, in fact, that the so-called sexual revolution of the twentieth century may have been a rather repressive cultural event. If the black-robed priest with his holy icons has, for much of the educated middle class, taken a step back into the shadows, he has often been succeeded by the genial therapist commending faith in the blessed trinity of good health, steady earnings and good (heterosexual) sex.

This movement from the policing of the religious spirit to the (far subtler) policing of desire began even before Freud and the culture of normative psychoanalysis. It seems that the Victorians, whom we tend to imagine as button-lipped on the subject of sex, actually could talk about little else, providing that the talk went on in the jargon of scientific high seriousness. The drive behind the newly burgeoning *scientia sexualis* was to describe and codify sexual life, to create multivolume encyclopedias of human sexuality that would exhaust the topic. Anything but an age of simple repression, the Victorian period was, we are now told, loud with erudite babble on the subject of sex.

But the Victorian subject of sex was not, to get back to Vidal's distinction, primarily a science of acts. It was a science of persons. That is, the assumption began to take hold that a person's essential identity was established by his or her sexual preferences. Thus came the genesis of an astounding number of sexual character types: the pedophile, the fetishist, the hysterical woman, the repressed man. A miser was someone who had never quite left the anal-erotic stage; the compulsive talker was locked in an impossible romance with her mother's breast. Suddenly you were, in some inescapable and essential way, what you did in bed or on the floor, or—a sophisticated step later—what you had done in excess or not enough as a child. At the center of this vast botany of human types was the key and commanding distinction: One was either homosexual or heterosexual, gay or straight.

Homosexuality, says Michel Foucault, whose thinking I have been paraphrasing here, was invented in 1870. To put it less dramatically, one might say that people around that time began talking less about same-sex erotic acts and more about homosexual persons. To Foucault, the invention of homosexuality contributed vastly to the designs of

Mark Edmundson is a professor of English at the University of Virginia and the author of Towards Reading Freud, *due out this month from Princeton University Press.*

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something that he, with a Parisian weakness for darkly imposing God-replacements, calls Power. Power achieves its goals—conformity and productivity—by conferring, enforcing and manipulating identities. The coherent inner self, which was to Kant and many of his Enlightenment compeers the source of freedom, is to Foucault a function of Power. The more stable a selfhood you have, the more it's conferred on you by the reigning normative sciences, the easier you are to know and thus to control.

Foucault's reflections on the disciplined subject are the takeoff point for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. But Sedgwick puts a very fresh and canny twist on Foucault. Disciplinary society (our society, as Foucault and Sedgwick conceive it) doesn't confer clear identities—gay or straight, depraved or righteous—so much as it systematically blurs the boundaries between the terms, thus leaving everybody, and most painfully gay men, in a state of anxious uncertainty. That uncertainty is much more manipulable, Sedgwick argues, than any monolithic identity could possibly be. The "discourse" of modern sexuality keeps everybody off balance.

One of Sedgwick's strengths—one of many—is that she can show this uncertainty to be in effect not just in influential literary works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (she offers readings of Melville, Wilde, Nietzsche, James and Proust, among others) but also, with horrible effect, in the contemporary political and legal spheres. Despite all of the talk current now about "engaged" or "activist" literary criticism, no book I have recently read is as successful as Sedgwick's in making provocative connections between literary acts and social dynamics.

What, exactly, is this system of imposed uncertainty that makes Vidal's paradise of sexual acts, from Sedgwick's point of view at least, currently untenable? Sedgwick sees contemporary American culture as sustaining a pair of mutually exclusive definitions of gay male identity (the degree to which this is applicable to lesbians is left open). These she calls the "universalizing" and the "minoritizing" views. The universalizing view (Vidal's view, more or less) holds that there is no such thing as a stable erotic identity: Everyone is, at least to some degree, bisexual in disposition if not in actual behavior. The minoritizing view maintains that there are persons who are, essentially and unalterably, gay. Most of us, Sedgwick thinks, hold both of these views simultaneously, despite the fact that they comprise what she calls "irreducible incoherence." What interests Sedgwick isn't the epistemological oddity of the situation but its social effects.

Take, for example, what Sedgwick identifies as a current legal defense for violence against gay men, the "homosexual panic" defense. The homosexual panic defense maintains that there exists a certain distinct minority of men who become so threatened by a homosexual advance that they panic, enter a psychotic phase and can't be held fully responsible for their violent (re)actions. And those actions are carried out against another recognizable minority, people who are intrinsically, essentially gay. But the efficiency of the defense relies on establishing a feeling of kinship between jurors and defendants. "Yes," the juror is supposed to think, "that's the way I could have acted. Wouldn't anyone be likely to do the same?"

The defense plays on the incoherence between minoritizing and universalizing conceptions of sexual identity. "Gay-bashing," the juror may suppose, "is something only latent homosexuals do: Those people are sick and deserve judicial mercy." But also (secretly), "That's something I might do: Let's let them off easy." Of course, that thinking sets up scenarios in which anyone ("because we're all a little bit gay") can be identified by another as a homosexual ("someone who's really gay") making an advance, and be assaulted as a consequence. This incoherence leaves everyone, at times, open to blackmail, open to violence, a victim of Foucault's discipline.

Sedgwick argues that sexual double binds have been the way of the Western world since at least the latter part of the nineteenth century. John Claggart, the homosexual villain in Melville's *Billy Budd*, is portrayed as being both part of a small and reprehensible minority *and* a partial reflection of the reader and everyone else in the novella, a universal ingredient in male selfhood. Claggart's confusion (is he natural or unnatural, innocent or corrupt?) isn't, accordingly, limited to him: It is a confusion that the men on the warship Bellipotent, all of whose desires are same-sex desires, and the reader, too, are compelled to share.

In a remarkable critical move, Sedgwick goes on to connect the epistemolog-

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ical confusion about sexual identity with the novel's political plot. Mutiny is in the offing, and just as anyone can be homosexual—and one can be gay oneself and not know—anyone is, potentially, a mutineer. The vigilance to discern "sexual deviation" plays reciprocally with a vigilance to ferret out (or to create for the purposes of example) the lineaments of treason.

This sort of double bind, in which one is caught between extremes, wondering at others and at oneself, and wondering at the shape of others' wondering at oneself in macabre mirror games, is, Sedgwick believes, representative of the effectively coercive illogic of our culture. In fact, she argues that many of the impossible double binds in which we find ourselves can, and ought to be, explicated by recourse to the tensions between gay and straight, between minoritizing and universalizing accounts of sexuality. We ought, Sedgwick feels, to use her reflections on sexual epistemology to look into such cultural dualisms as private and public, masculine and feminine, innocence and initiation, natural and artificial, the better to see how the incoherences within these oppositions make us the prey of discipline. Is Sedgwick right? Should we follow her lead?

Surely there are reasons to consider doing so. *Epistemology of the Closet* is a remarkable work of mind and spirit. The literary analyses are excellent: The Melville chapter, the brilliant complexity of which my description barely touches, is one of the best critical essays I have read in the past five years. Though the book is cast in a densely academic idiom, it manages to be surprising, moving and witty. At its best, Sedgwick's style is both intimate and forcefully analytical. One must add, though, that at her infrequent worst she commits some astoundingly bad sentences: Abstractions pile into each other as though an intellectual demolition derby were in progress. And too, the structure of *Epistemology of the Closet* is disappointing: Some of the later chapters seem to precede, conceptually, those encountered earlier, such that the work lacks a drama of unfolding thought. But whatever faults of protocol the book may have, they are virtually eclipsed by its scruple, its intellectual rigor (the book is academic in the best sense of the word), its humane honesty and, most important, by its stunningly high standard of intelligence.

Yet, I wonder about Sedgwick's central premise. Do we all, as she claims, hold minoritizing and universalizing views of sexual identity in dangerous suspension, making ourselves and others prey to a cruel incoherence? Sedgwick, I think, is a touch misleading when she uses the term "universalizing" to describe one take on sexual identity. "Universalizing" sounds bad; it associates the perspective with those oppressive metaphysical systems from which many intellectuals are trying to distance themselves. But what Sedgwick calls a universalizing view is actually one holding that accident, luck, personal choice, environment and a variety of other factors contribute to making our erotic selves what they are. The view confirms as well that those erotic selves will change: They are the product and the future prey of, among other things, time and chance. Under such an understanding, our relationship to erotic life would be comparable in many ways (though not all) to our relationship to the vocation that we've both chosen and been chosen by. I'm not sure, that is, that this sort of understanding, one that affirms the contingency of erotic choice and starts out from the working hypothesis that everyone is, at least potentially, bisexual in disposition, isn't rather commonplace in the present, both among gay people and straight. And if this view (which ought to be called a contingent, not a universalizing, one) is at least sometimes in effect, the sorts of binds that Sedgwick is so brilliant at explicating are not the *exclusive* order of our cultural moment.

Perhaps it's not accidental that the texts Sedgwick uses to illustrate the double bind come from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and from some of the more benighted moments in contemporary litigation. Would matters be the same if for Melville and Company the book substituted contemporary gay and lesbian writers like Allen Ginsberg, Rita Mae Brown, Edmund White and Adrienne Rich?

Maybe so. But my view—and it is a view, I should admit, derived from far less intense and lengthy reflection than Sedgwick's—is that Sedgwick is right for some people and situations but not for all. Though we haven't yet reached the desirable state that Vidal describes, in which sex acts lose their social and cosmic (though not, one hopes, their personal) resonance, it's also doubtful that in the culture of the present every gay person is caught in an endlessly revolving closet door. □

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Of Time and the River

BEATRIX GATES

THE DROWNED RIVER. *By Thomas Lux. Houghton Mifflin. 68 pp. $16.95. Paper $8.95.*

GOING BACK TO THE RIVER. *By Marilyn Hacker. Vintage. 98 pp. Paper $9.95.*

Compassion allows the mind to tender the weight and feel of different lives, finding us vulnerable together. The poet James Wright held the gift of compassion extraordinarily lightly in his poems, and as I read these two collections, *Going Back to the River* by Marilyn Hacker and *The Drowned River* by Thomas Lux, he kept coming to mind.

In Wright's poem "Many of Our Waters: Variations on a Poem by a Black Child," he praises the words of his young friend. He also turns to his river of origin, knowing he needs everything from the tangled, flowing roots of home: "Along Aetnaville, where I was born,/I want to spend my eternity/In hell with you./And the moment I'm off, I'm off/Back home to my own river.//My rotted Ohio,/ . . . The Winnebago gave you your name, Ohio,/And Ohio means beautiful river." He gathers up the beautiful ugly, the *jolie laide* the French know how to name and Hacker so appreciates, as essential sources. In the center of Thomas Lux's new book we find these lines: "The daily fare, every day ugly in some way,/every day beautiful and gone," from "For My Daughter When She Can Read."

Letting James Wright act as medium to the echoes between Hacker and Lux is to say the three write an unashamed poetry, embracing the terrible, beautiful world—loving dailiness and never forgetting the lives that have gone before. Wright and the black child he loves shout across New York's Amsterdam Avenue, bridging the speed of lights changing, and the magnet of their friendship holds. A similar depth shines through "Against Silence," the poem ending Hacker's new collection, where she chronicles her lasting friendship with Margaret Delaney. She gives us Delaney's solid acceptance of their different lives woven strongly together, at first through Delaney's son and then through her granddaughter, Iva, "British born, Black by law/and choice." Later, there's the bond of their own making. As words leave Margaret, and the loss sinks in, Hacker takes up some of her most tender speech: "A hemisphere/away from understanding where you are,/mourning your lost words, I am at a loss/for words to name what my loss of you is,/what it will be, or even what it was." We can celebrate passion and style very differently with Hacker and Lux, but still find poetry worthy of these last lines from James Wright: "Pity so old and alone, it is not alone, yours, or mine,/The pity of rivers and children, the pity of brothers, the pity/Of our country, which is our lives."

Lux's fifth full collection of poems, *The Drowned River*, tells the story and struggle of plain and magnificent humans. Lux describes us as "drowned" in the full tilt of living, in the flood of history and in our own short breath relative to time's long view. The book, written without sections, turns a passionate insistence and questioning on the reader: Why lie or try to fool yourself? That would be feigning ignorance, and we are, admit it, ignorant enough as it is.

History is here as the lessons never learned, and the poet uses his forthright questions to chip sarcastically at the folly in "The Raid on Northampton": "It makes us feel a part of one long line//but at the same time superior: *they*/were different then—savage,/intolerant, greedy, God-crazy brave./Why else do we commemorate//the battlefield . . . ?" The poet chooses to remember the nameless survivors at the edges of the picture over and over again. "Haitian Cadavers" is unforgettable:

> Harvard, Yale, don't have problems
> getting bodies,
> . . . the deal is good,
> the deal is visionary: $50.00—
> American—per stiff,
>
> the supply solid, never dwindling,
> and the topper
> that makes it so smooth—a too true
> capital dream—is the condition
>
> of the corpses: so thin, all so thin
> . . . the organs
> yield to the blade with amazing ease.

The poem "Summer Evening, 1864, Andersonville, Georgia" depicts the barest terms of life and justice in a language

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Beatrix Gates, founder of Granite Press, lives in Brooklyn. Her work is included in Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time *(St. Martin's).*

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not quite offhand but stripped clean: " . . . Six somewhat healthy men,/who got that way preying on weaker men,/get hanged. Who has the strength//cheers. Who has the will,/and a few spongy turnips,/lives." The second-to-last line slows to cradle the odd, life-giving word "spongy," followed by the sharp furrow of the "v" plowing through to the end result, "lives." Lux's timing is impeccable.

There are terrible songs in this book, terrible because their construction is so beautiful, the message so savage in its demand that the reader open in kind. Lux's portrait of Stalin in "Uncle Joe"; "Bodo," the poem of the ignored who give blood to history; and "The Deadhouse at the Workhouse," the song of debt that grinds bodies and souls cold—these powerful poems are the deadly currents and riptides of the "drowned," a song present in any river if you can hear it. The clear-eyed detail in his poems stuns, and eventually does render a cumulative, unshiny faith, such as the faith necessary for "The Garden." You know he loves making a workaday list for the unseen art of transformation: "The basic metaphor is good: blend dead,/redolent things—dried blood,/steamed bone meal, dried hoof and horn/meal, slag, dolomite,/bat guano—into the dirt,/wait; live things will emerge."

Returning to Lux's poem "For My Daughter When She Can Read," we see the angry honesty and hope with which he meets the world: " . . . there are few options: fragile,/unprofitable love, an insistence,/a fierce, arrogant insistence/toward truth, tolerance, sanity, and a refusal/to self-congratulate for seeking the same." The title of the book takes a turn here, perhaps coincidentally, as he tenderly admits: " . . . You were nothing/then; you were underwater but not drowned,/a contradiction I loved." Humor in the form of delight ripples through these lines and shows up full-blown in the poem "Kwashiorkor; Marasmus," a flight into imagined definitions, including "An unknown river whose banks drip feathers" and "A long-forgotten,/one-sided battle won easily by imperialists." A love of words and a devotion to those "who pumped one oar/among thousands at Lepanto, ocean/up to his clavicles and rising" rule this book. The poems in *The Drowned River* are made from lives we cannot ignore. He makes them our own.

Marilyn Hacker has given us six books of poetry as well as *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*, a novel in verse that was put out by a new publisher who was better able to appreciate the hot chronicle of a year in lesbian romance. Hacker has always risked—through her fearless choice of subject and form. I remember hearing her read "Part of a True Story," a poem dedicated to Margaret Delaney that evokes a letter dictated by Harriet Tubman to Amelia Bloomer requesting a new bloomer suit. Tubman, who was known as "the General" even by her commanding officer after she led a successful raid up the Combahee River with a detachment of soldiers from Colonel Montgomery's command, delighted in this timely invention, long skirts having proved useless in her campaign. Hacker continues to witness with brave imagination in her latest book, and that range is why I have called the work wide and tender.

The emotional magnet at the center of Hacker's books is her lesbian identity,

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which she knits ferociously into form. She portrays her life as lived: in her two cities, Paris and New York; in the world of lesbian and lover; as mother to her daughter's black and Jewish origins. In form, she makes every experience an indivisible one. So it is with lesbian identity, constantly created on our own terms in forms that cannot be denied or erased. *Going Back to the River* is no exception, and Hacker uses the villanelle for "From Orient Point"; envelope tercets in "For K.J., Leaving and Coming Back" and the incredibly lovely "Celles"; a sestina that could make Patsy Cline proud in "Country and Western"; a pantoum for "Market Day"; and her favorite, a crown, for "Separate Lives," the afterword to her last book. Above all in her new book there is a cherishing of friends, imagining ". . . we'd be old ladies on/a hill like this, where people still got old//in housedresses and navy cardigans"; shared meals; walks; deep sexual pleasures; and a loyalty born of generosity. The French have preserved a loyalty comparable to these traditions, and so her annual crossing becomes a deeper gesture toward living with care.

In the fast-paced narratives, "Nights of 1962: The River Merchant's Wife" and "Nights of 1964–1966: The Old Reliable," we see a young, vulnerable dyke stumbling into self-conscious community: "what did they make of me/on a barstool at the Sea Colony/in a paint-splattered Black Watch shirt, old khak-/i work pants, one long braid straight down my back,/ . . . Boys' bars had dancefloors. Puerto Rican queens/in mohair sweaters, who'd worked up routines/in kitchens, line-danced to . . . 'From a Jack to a Queen.' " The requisite fantasy adds humor to her first, early 60s, gay girl bar excursion: "Seduction by the French Department head/to whom I owed a paper on Genet/was what I had in mind, and I assumed/she'd know how to proceed beyond the full-/face closeup kiss on which my mind's lens zoomed/in, blanked out." Hacker offers crisp characterizations of her particular circle of friends and the inexorable flow of the mid-60s lived on New York City's Lower East Side: "Bill and Russell were painters. Bill had been/a monk in Kyoto. Stoned, we sketched together,/till he discovered poppers and black leather." The poem's zoom retrospect ends on a chilling note of the 90s: ". . . We railed against the war./Soon, some of us bussed south with SNCC and CORE./Soon, some of us got busted dealing drugs./The file clerks took exams and forged ahead./The decorators' kitchens blazed persimmon./The secretary started kissing women,/and so did I, and my three friends are dead."

In "Days of 1944: Three Friends," Hacker layers the friends' few lines in sequence and a devastating picture emerges: "My father and grandmother were shot./The Germans burned our house. The furniture/was parceled out at auction, lot by lot." The second continues, "We had to walk from Rodez to Millau./My sister, with her patent-leather shoes/tied to a string . . . / . . . I was ten. I walked, I knew, . . . / . . . My sister's shoes shone, two/crystals. I'd left my fossil box at home./But that was nothing. Just what we lived through." Last, she gives us her own relative innocence, her omissions marking her powerlessness over the destruction of her kind: "I know the countries, not the counties or/towns my grandparents left—whose other Jews/the fire took, while you lived, I played, at war."

Friends have been lost, some dead, and she marks the changes, small and large: the sober/sad perspective on her last lover, and the "owned certainty; perpetual surprise" that has arrived with the mature, shared love of "For K.J., Leaving and Coming Back." Hacker's private negotiations with her heart have grown to include an acceptance of her past and changing selves as well as of the world and those she loves. As she says in the last

GOOD TIMING

On a ridge a horse is running
and down below, a young girl timing him—
from one pine to another. Fingers
wrapped around her wrist, she's counting
her heartbeats. Fingers placed
to the pulse as if to cover
a tightly held secret. The way
the horse's legs throw the sky
into motion. Should she tell
her brothers about him? The fingers
lift, but the beating hooves go on.

Such counting runs a secret down
like a clock. Two-bit lessons in kissing
she's learned in the movies. Say the kiss
of 1937. And no one to practice on
but the blue shadows of the hedgerow.
The dark horse, he listens and runs, listens
and runs. Had someone off camera
been timing the two mouths' shared
exchange of air? Their audience
more breathless than any other?
Unwrap the fingers. Halt the stream
of numbers. Let the horse return now
into the far, unobservable trees.

Under her brothers' new rope
the horse is helpless. He runs away
with himself. All through autumn
he deepens a path at the very edge
of the corral. The man she'll finally kiss
hasn't seen the movie. Come January,
he isn't sure what to do: stranded
in her father's porchlight, all her warmth
coming at him in all that cold.
The horse, he's a tough one to figure.
He bucks off the rider, then
the saddle. How to know if he'll ever
stop, if she'll ever get her hand
through the reins. He pulls loose
from the tether and goes round.

Nance Van Winckel

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lines of the title poem, "Wherever I live, let me come home to you/as you are, I as I am, where you/meet me and walk with me to the river." □

The Head of the Class

FREDRIC PAUL SMOLER

THE IMPERIAL MIDDLE: Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Class. *By Benjamin DeMott. Morrow. 264 pp. $18.95.*

Pondering the origins of inequality, Rousseau observed that while the question of whether social inequality was the product of natural inequality was perhaps a good topic for slaves to discuss in the hearing of their masters, it was not one that need detain serious thinkers. Benjamin DeMott argues in *The Imperial Middle* that the American situation is a deal bleaker than the one assumed by Rousseau, for we find it almost impossible to concede that structural social inequality—class, in the more recent locution—is a significant constraint on our lives. He is tersely eloquent about the extent to which our politics are deformed and our public discourses distorted by this systematic deceit and evasion, asserting that our incapacity to acknowledge the sweep and power of class in conditioning our fates is the single most terrible obstacle we face in constructing a polity less cruelly unjust. This is a book with origins in the intellectual and rhetorical tradition of American studies; DeMott knows in his bones that the deprecation, even the denial of class and its potency are central to the American project, the source of some of our best hopes as well as the most disabling delusion abroad in the land.

Who are the "we" so invoked? Not the regular readers of *The Nation*, who recite the cantrip "class, race and gender" as if it were the rosary. DeMott is addressing a larger if faintly improbable audience: He is attempting to speak to fellow citizens. In the context of our national political life his arguments have immense force and relevance, for it is in that large context that American evasions of class are so striking. A left that has come to dominate patches of academe, and that has a few tabloids in its secure possession, is in the national political context less embattled than ghettoized; it has clearly failed to persuade the bulk of the electorate of its arguments. DeMott has undertaken to determine why: why, to quote *The Imperial Middle*'s subtitle, Americans can't think straight about class.

His best chapters anatomize what Americans think about when they dismiss class. The practice of understanding class in terms of taste and consumption patterns allows for the trivialization of the category or, more subtly, its dismissal as a species of snobbery, and an American can thus feel politically virtuous—democratic—while denying the importance of class. The belief that class is temporary and various, a product of our convictions as well as our pretensions about social mobility, is strengthened by our taste for the demotic; populist affectations of pseudoplebeianism allow us to doubt, in DeMott's phrase, that social differences are hard, fast and momentous. Our democratic sentiments take another toll: We imagine class differences as something honorable people see "through" and "past." Our mass and popular cultures minimize the power of class through varieties of comic deflation; once again, an apparently democratic stripping away of social pretensions serves to blur sight and dull judgment about the actualities of class power.

DeMott offers a few graceless coinages; his "omni syndrome," for my money an unpleasant neologism, is nonetheless a potent piece of psychological analysis. Middle-class Americans exult in the multiplicity of social poses they can strike; this admirable freedom is achieved at the price of weakening middle-class awareness of the more durable cast of other people's social location. Again, it is the better, freer part of American culture that weakens our understanding of our situation.

The strongest parts of this book are its fluent and subtle demonstrations of the extent to which we are so disabled. DeMott takes great sweeps of the culture as his text; he is admirably wide-ranging. An agile and omnivorous reader, he documents the American impairment in places as diverse as the plots of *Cagney and Lacey*, almost the whole of *The New York Times*, the live commentary of Walter Cronkite, the personae of George

Fredric Paul Smoler teaches history and literature at Sarah Lawrence College.

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Bush and the media coverage of various crimes, scandals and causes célèbres. The talent for reading across the breadth of a culture being as rare as is the assertion of its necessity, a simple description of DeMott's project may fail to do it justice. The humanities are awash in facile readings of novel varieties of text, but DeMott is the real McCoy: His readings are generous, subtle, illuminating and generally persuasive. It is hard to read skillfully, and Theory, with its dreary habit of informing adepts well in advance of the act of reading of what a text could possibly say, has not made the practice any easier. Thoughtful readings, frequently announced but rarely delivered, are always worth the time.

So phrasing DeMott's project may still unfairly diminish the reader's sense of his achievement. While omnivorousness marks modern cultural studies as its practitioners define their art, DeMott is writing for a much wider audience than academic critics normally envision. We are awash in simple-minded readings, whether encoded in Theoryspeak or expressed in the humbler accents of vulgar Marxism, mechanical Foucaultism or any of the other variants of automatic writing. DeMott is writing in a vocabulary accessible to what was once known as the general reader, and to this particular general reader the gesture seems a mark of political seriousness. I seem to remember that a liberal middle class, when this country was possessed of such a commodity, was much given to books written in this idiom. DeMott is perfectly aware of this, and he seems to be consciously striving to reinvigorate a rhetorical tradition associated with Richard Hofstadter, Lionel Trilling and Robert Merton. I suspect that some *Nation* readers will consider this quixotic at best and sinister at worst; I am not so sure. DeMott's attempt to revive this tradition should be examined before it is dismissed or despised.

There is much to argue with, and I leave most of these arguments to DeMott's readers. To contest only one point, I am not sure that class consciousness is as diffuse and muted as DeMott seems to think it is; his imperial middle, with its consistent and concerted attempts to marginalize difference, may have persuaded itself of its success in this enterprise more than it has persuaded any of the subaltern classes. DeMott hints at some of the uglier forms subaltern class consciousness may take, and I would add that Republican skills at mobilizing subaltern *ressentiment* were at least as important a prop of high Reaganism as was a dulling of imperial middle conscience. My demurrals, some of them sharper, could go on apace, but this is an intelligent and honorable book; I hope it finds the readers it deserves. □

INTERPRETERS IN ONE LANGUAGE

The harbor's the dull side of foil today.
If this were theatre, there would be muffled thunder.
The sky is perfectly gray, a clouded plate.
Staten Island is all black trees, Manhattan's
built on something like pyrite—a fool's slate—
asphalt, and concrete. Not far away, a ferryboat's passing,
freighting something like goldenrod from painted borough to borough.

When speaking a foreign language, everything
is unreal. Anything could have been said; conversation
has no basis in fact. A word, born somewhere else,
reminds its listener of nothing intentional. Longing itself
knows just how sketchy it is. It's the best of unspeakable
paintings: here is the work of years of nearsighted souls
who came across so clearly on paper.

The question today is jellyfish in the river—why
transparent beings are not invisible. Why would
somebody want power? All of the speakers longed
for something that they could control, for things
to go perfectly right for a change. No nasty surprises.
By the end of the speeches, the harbor the way it is,
all of us came to see how much we longed for surprises.

Elizabeth Macklin

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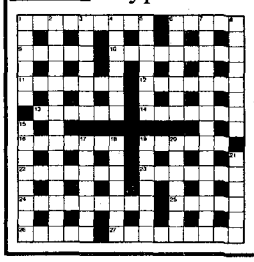

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D	E	S	E	R	E	T		E	N	A	M	E	L	S
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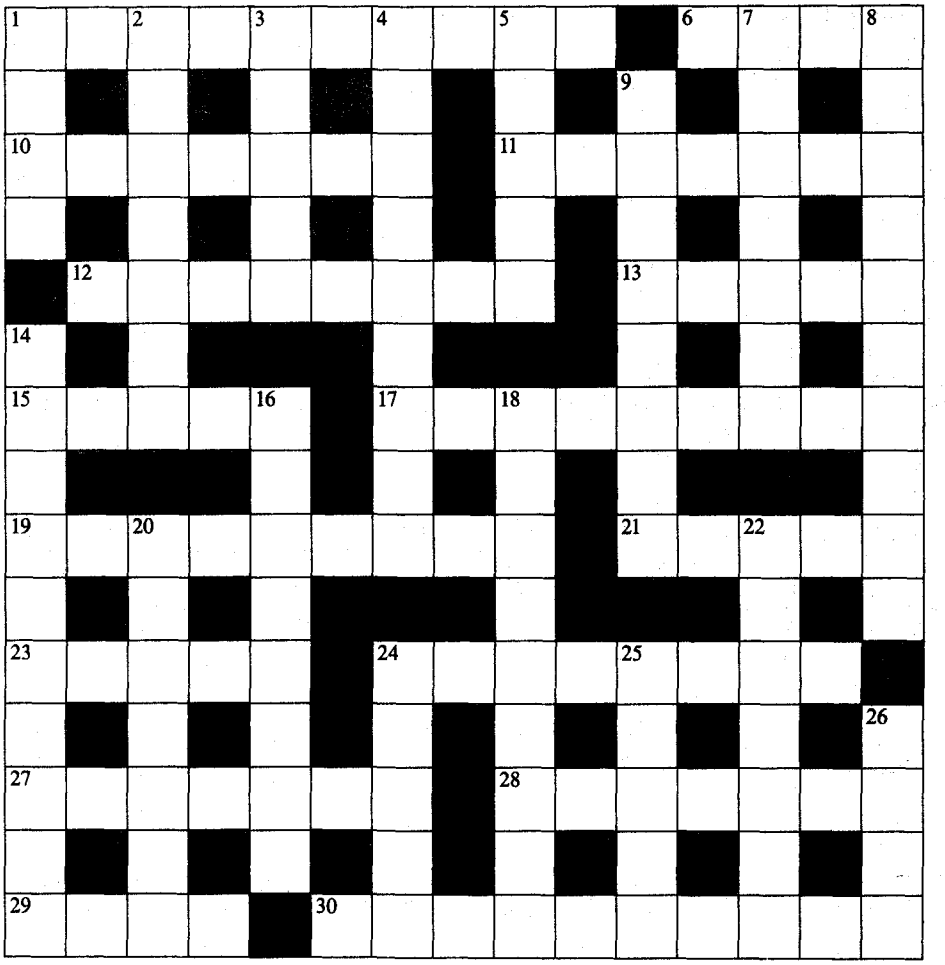

ACROSS

1 Support the "release" of workers? A Detroit lemon might be earlier than expected. (10)
6 and 10 It doesn't involve being able to raise your hands above your head, but N.R.A. doesn't seem to like what the presidents talked about. (4,7)
11 See 1 down
12 A shakeup in the C.I.A., with heavy expenditure of resources for an environmental problem. (4,4)
13 You might catch this in the act. (5)
15 Not out, as one may allow, with a narrow passage. (5)
17 Just getting started in it, I go on a date—not a steady one. (9)
19 and 28 Bar giving a lift to the old people with you having some "buts" about it. (The market might be upset by certain ones.) (9,7)
21 Seeing I've recently seen one here, a cheerful one is supposedly loved by the highest authority. (5)
23 A sort of louse, or bird. (5)
24 Where things may be a grind with a lot of people—though it offers a current supply of power. (9)
27 From a South American spot to our own country, it might be causing a disturbance! (7)
28 See 19 across
29 Might be decorated with a bow window, in part. (4)
30 In a manner everlasting, yet with little change it's less timely. (10)

DOWN

1 and 11 Spinal anesthetics might be considered out of date. (4,7)
2 False coin the so-called silent chief executive put in good shape. (7)
3 Experienced good or bad fortune. (Note it has a colorful end.) (5)
4 What one might be doing after the shells are thrown out. (A loud opening and an added point is getting something for nothing!) (10)
5 Sturdy chiffon, partly worn in only one place. (5)
7 One committee to do so found itself in trouble! Creepy, too! (7)
8 Clothes hangers for men? (10)
9 "Breaking up things" is very good English. (8)
14 Little William eats away from home, they may publicly inform you. (10)
16 Held in this, one is really a captive. (8)
18 There may be no point to such pencils having erasers. (9)
20 Sixes need little company with you and me, which is a little bit sticky. (7)
22 Such things as nature reputedly dislikes, although one could be cleaner. (7)
24 A very tall 24 across with no place to work. Try to see him as aide-de-camp. (5)
25 Some verse doesn't have it, though it doesn't have to be without reason. (5)
26 What the British have with a coconut, perhaps, is very pale. (4)

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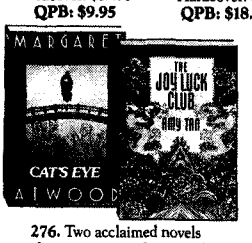

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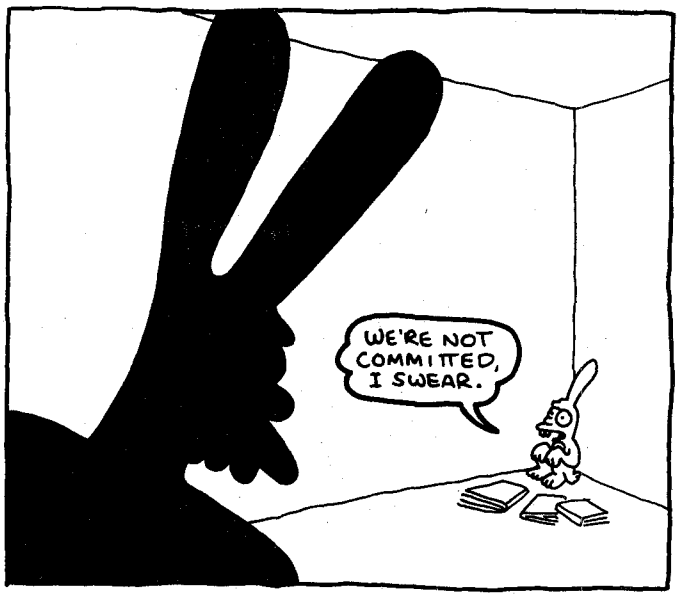

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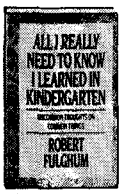

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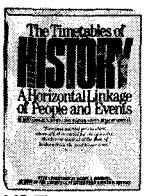

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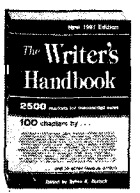

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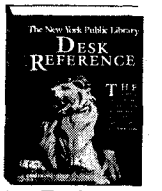

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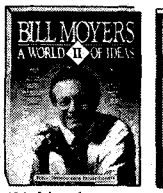

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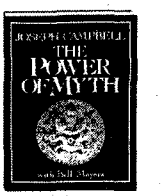

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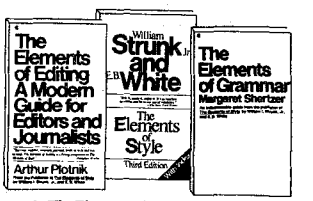
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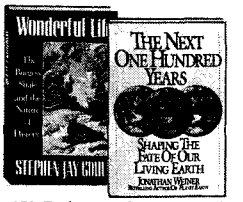

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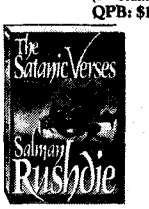

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